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COCKBURN: THE BAGHDAD BOMBING
See Page 258

EDI

# THE NUCLEAR OPTION

The war is going "right on schedule," military briefers tell us. But lurking behind their bland assurances we sense uneasiness, a feeling that the Iraqi military is not about to crack, an unspoken fear that American ground forces could walk into some terrible calamity—a bloody tank battle, a chemical attack—that would cause great pain and anger at home. These lurking anxieties lend credibility to reports that the Administration is looking seriously at the possibility of nuclear retaliation, which it has never categorically ruled out.

It's unlikely at this point that President Bush would authorize a nuclear offensive to soften up Iraqi defenses—the political fallout would be too great. But it's not so clear that he would not take up the nuclear option in the event of some military disaster. Defense Secretary Dick Cheney hinted as much when he told U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia that if "Saddam Hussein is foolish enough to use weapons of mass destruction, the U.S. response would be absolutely overwhelming and it would be devastating." Given that conventional bombing has already pulverized Iraq, what sort of "devastating" options remain?

Chemical weapons might not have the massive retributive effect sought by Washington. Fuel-air explosives (FAEs) approximate the destructive power of smaller nuclear munitions, but they would not appreciably shorten the war. In the end, Bush may conclude that only nuclear weapons could provide an "absolutely overwhelming" response and hasten Iraq's defeat.

America may well "prevail" in the gulf war without recourse to nukes, but the fact that U.S. leaders are even considering the use of nuclear, chemical or FAEs shows the pathological impact of this war on the national psyche—one that will persist for many years to come.

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HOW TO END THE WAR
Charles William Maynes
Peter Weiss
Robert C. Johansen
Richard Falk

BALKAN THRILLER
Slavenka Drakulić

CONFESSIONS OF 'BAGHDAD BETTY'
Margot Kidder

THE SELLING OF SHELBY STEELE
Adolph Reed Jr.

MAX NEUHAUS'S 'TIMES SQUARE'
Arthur C. Danto

SCHOOLS AND DEMOCRACY

# CHOICE CAN *SAVE* PUBLIC EDUCATION

DEBORAH W. MEIER

Before deciding to go down in history as a war President, George Bush called himself our "education President," announcing ambitious goals to make American schoolchildren first in the world by the year 2000. These goals were applauded by politicians, educators and corporate leaders across the political spectrum. America's future itself, they all declared, is at stake, but, unlike the gulf war, they believe this future can be bought cheaply.

The conservatives have the answer: choice. It's a solution, they note, that doesn't require throwing money at schools. And furthermore it's politically correct. The marketplace, they remind us gloatingly, will cure what a socialistic system of schooling has produced: the miseducation of our young. The most articulate and contentious proponents of marketplace choices in education are John Chubb and Terry Moe, whose articles, speeches and book, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, have sparked widespread debate. But this is not merely a battle of words. A number of localities and several states have initiated systems of choice, often using Chubb and Moe's data to support their programs. While Chubb and Moe contend that they favor public education, what they mean is public funding for education. Public institutions are their enemy. They make no bones about it: Private is good, public is bad. Private equals enterprising, public equals stifling bureaucracy and destructive political influence.

(*Cont. on p. 266*)

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# LETTERS.

## EMOTIONAL ISSUE

*St. Louis*

Katha Pollitt's article "When Is a Mother Not a Mother?" [Dec. 31] tackled a complicated, emotional issue in a sensitive, well-thought-out manner. Pollitt helped me make up my mind about that issue, surrogate pregnancy, which I'd been struggling with for quite some time. The key was her ability to examine both sides of the argument and still provide convincing evidence that left little doubt as to the proper conclusion. I will look for Pollitt's byline first when I pick up your magazine.

*Laura Bryant*

## TAKING ISSUE

*Roslyn Heights, N.Y.*

As a longtime male feminist, I am numbered among Katha Pollitt's admirers. She invariably brings a new perspective and incisive analysis to well-trodden polemic ground. However, I take issue with Pollitt on her apparent unconditional support for the parental rights of the surrogate mother. With the unhappy record of birth-giving mothers murdering, torturing and abusing their infants, it is obvious that bearing a child does not confer an automatic ability to nurture, love and rear a child. While I would agree that a surrogate mother may possess parental rights that transcend a previous agreement, the suitability of exercising those rights should be determined on a case-by-case basis.

*Kenneth J. Rawson*

## PLAN IT OF THE APES

*Hilo, Hawaii*

The intraspecies embryo transplants long routine among cattle breeders have raised no hotly debated legal or moral issues. Neither, apparently, have interspecies transplants, which began as laboratory experiments only a few years ago but are now an accepted practice in the effort to increase the chances for survival of endangered species of animals. What will happen when and if a human embryo is implanted in a female of some other species of primate—chimp, gorilla or orangutan—and brought to term? We can't rule out the possibility.

*Frank G. Nelson*

## POLLITT REPLIES

*New York City*

Kenneth J. Rawson is not the only reader who thinks I want surrogate mothers to keep their kids no matter what. My position is that surrogacy contracts have no legal standing, and that therefore surrogates have the *same* rights as other mothers. Mothers (or fathers) who abuse their kids can lose their parental rights, and this is as it should be. But we don't make parents prove their fitness before they take their babies home from the hospital. How, indeed, *would* someone prove he or she was not a potential child murderer?

I wonder why Rawson, who says he is a male feminist, questions the fitness of the birth-giving mother and not that of the contracting couple. Is it because she is lower class, maybe unmarried, maybe black, and they are Mr. and Mrs. Solid Citizen? Yet surrogates have, in a way, already proved their fitness: They are already raising kids who are still in one piece. The contracting couple are a blank slate. I suspect that Rawson, like most of the public, accepts the couple's prosperity and longing for children as proof of the good job they would do. But child abuse—physical, emotional, sexual—is no lower-class monopoly, and wanting kids is no guarantee of good parenting. Joel Steinberg and Hedda Nussbaum, the lawyer and the editor, went to great lengths to acquire two children when they could not have their own, and look what happened.

Frank G. Nelson's fears about interspecies surrogacy are not as farfetched as they sound. No doubt this further degradation of motherhood will be presented as essential to fetal health and a great advance for women's rights. Aldous Huxley, where are you now?

*Katha Pollitt*

## STICKS AND STONES

*Philadelphia*

Hillel Schenker's "Letter From Israel" [Jan. 21] expresses sympathy for what he calls "the nonlethal *intifada*, as it was carried out during most of the first three years of the struggle." If the *intifada* has been "nonlethal," how does Schenker account for the many Jews—and Arabs—who have been murdered in *intifada* violence? What about Benny Meisner and Chaim Sharabani, who were murdered by Arab rock throwers? What about the sixteen civilians murdered when an Arab steered an Israeli bus off a cliff near Jerusalem? What about 8-year-old Hanan Zaguri, who was murdered in the town of Kiryat Tivon by a terrorist who crushed his skull with a large stone? What about the more than 300 Arabs who have been brutally murdered by Palestinian death squads, in some cases because they are alleged to have collaborated with Israelis but often as the result of underworld feuds, romantic quarrels, clan disputes or allegations that they had failed to adhere to the moral codes of fundamentalist Islam? If Schenker wants to be a cheerleader for the *intifada*, that is his choice. But readers of *The Nation* should not be misled as to the lethal nature of *intifada* violence.

*Bertram Korn Jr.*
*Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America*

## SCHENKER REPLIES

*Tel Aviv*

If Bertram Korn Jr. would reread my article, he would note that I distinguished between the actual *intifada*, which I defined as "a combination of rock throwing and gasoline bombs, nonviolent civil disobedience and infrastructure building" and a full-fledged ideal nonviolent Martin Luther King Jr./Gandhian *intifada*. I added that three years of frustration had led Palestinians to replace the rock with the knife, leading to a series of "brutal knife attacks against Israeli civilians." If that is cheerleading, I recommend Korn return to school for Elementary Cheerleading 101.

Sitting in Tel Aviv in the midst of the gulf war, having been awakened twice last night by sirens, this debate seems to refer to something that mattered eons ago. But nothing could be further from the truth. When the war ends, Israelis and Palestinians will be left facing each other once again. The occupation will still be there, and the *intifada* will be renewed. The time will be ripe, not for quibbling semantic arguments about the nature of the *intifada* or scorecard accounts of who killed more people (believe me, Mr. Korn, many more Palestinians have been killed by Israeli soldiers and settlers than Israelis by Palestinians) but for creative initiatives to resolve the conflict based upon the right to self-determination for both Israelis and Palestinians. If we don't do it ourselves, the world will do it for us.

*Hillel Schenker*

## TANKS A LOT

*Chicago*

Please make sure Douglas McGrath continues to send his dispatches from inside the White House [Jan. 7/14]. They're the funniest thing I've read since Calvin Trillin took up poetry. However, I must take the gas out of one of McGrath's gags. Chrysler Corporation sold its tank operation several years ago. The manufacture of tanks that operate in the desert for no more than forty-five minutes without breaking down is now in the most competent hands of General Dynamics Corporation.

*John Knox*

## McGRATH REPLIES

*Washington*

I love that John Knox does not question my central conceit: that a major American corporation would sell the government a tank with guns pointed inside at its operators. He questions only *which* major American corporation. While General Dynamics may not be so appreciative, I'm sure Chrysler, and certainly I, thank him for his correction.

*Douglas McGrath*

### CORRECTION

The zip code of the Center for Constitutional Rights ["Full-Court Press," Feb. 11] is 10012.

*The Nation* welcomes letters—typed, double spaced and no longer than 300 words, please. Letters may be edited for reasons of space.

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# EDITORIALS.

## Stopping the War

*We asked four experts on foreign affairs to give us their ideas for diplomatic solutions to the gulf war.*

### CHARLES WILLIAM MAYNES

Peace can return to the Persian Gulf in three ways: submission, conquest or compromise. The Kuwaitis and the rest of the world can submit to Saddam Hussein's territorial demands and peace will be restored, at least temporarily. The U.S.-led coalition can conquer Kuwait and peace will be restored for a while. Or both sides can look for a compromise.

Because the Iraqi aggression is such an egregious breach of the United Nations norm against the acquisition of territory by force, no one wants to submit to Iraq's territorial demands, not even the countries opposing U.S. policy in the gulf. But many states also question the wisdom of a coalition conquest of Kuwait because of the massive casualties Iraq and Kuwait will certainly suffer, and perhaps the coalition armies as well. Many fear the geopolitical consequences. If the war goes on too much longer, mass anger at technologically superior Western states bombing a helpless Iraqi population could topple governments throughout the Muslim world.

The dilemma is that most people also believe there is no alternative to conquest because compromise would constitute "appeasement." Appeasement acquired its bad name when France and Britain allowed Hitler to dismember Czechoslovakia in order to avoid war. The deal seemed dishonorable at the time and foolhardy not too much later. Is this the kind

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of compromise that Iraq hinted might be possible in the current crisis?

Not at all. Initially Iraq contended that Kuwait belonged to Iraq by right, and that its conquest of Kuwait was therefore irrevocable. Then, when it saw the extraordinary coalition that was assembled against it, the Iraqi government shifted position. Saddam said he would not withdraw his forces until a comprehensive solution to "all the issues of occupation" in the Middle East was arrived at, including Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories and Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. The statement was noteworthy because it offered an explicit recognition of Israel within its 1967 borders. The United States nonetheless was quick to issue a "categorical" rejection.

Because Israel and Syria could not withdraw immediately from the territories they occupy, the Iraqi proposal might have been seen as a clever diversion. Two weeks later, however, in a statement that few noticed, Saddam said he would not insist on "a strict timetable": The issues could be linked sequentially rather than simultaneously.

In the weeks that followed, the United States seemed to go out of its way to dismiss the Iraqi offer. But then, on October 1, President Bush expressed hope to the U.N. General Assembly that if the crisis were settled according to the terms set by the U.N., opportunities could arise to settle the Arab-Israeli dispute. But reacting to criticism that the new offer was rewarding Iraqi aggression, the White House denied any linkage between the issues.

Clearly, the path to compromise lies in a serious effort to explore the August 14 proposal made by Iraq along with its subsequent clarification that the various issues in the region could be dealt with sequentially rather than simultaneously. Such an effort might determine that the Iraqis were never serious in offering to leave Kuwait. Then the war would grind on. But it is possible that they were then, and might be now, looking for a way out. In that case a creative diplomat should be able to bridge the gap between the Iraqi proposal and the President's U.N. formulation.

Needed to test this possibility is a pause in the bombing of Iraq and perhaps of Kuwait as well. Then a special envoy with credibility on both sides—a senior Pakistani official perhaps—should visit Iraq to explore paths to peace.

No doubt military memories of Vietnam would make it hard to persuade the Pentagon to approve a pause. The North Vietnamese used the bombing pauses to resupply their troops. But Iraq's situation is totally different. Its infrastructure has been destroyed, and its army is isolated in Kuwait. Meanwhile, no one is willing to resupply it with military equipment. The United States could warn that it would bomb any effort to resupply the troops in Kuwait during the pause.

The fighting has been so one-sided thus far that there is a strong temptation to press America's advantage. But the casualty ratio could change in the coming ground war, and the Administration should remember the lesson of the 1967 Middle East war. No victory could have been more sweeping than Israel's in that conflict. Yet the extraordinary scope of the victory prevented Israel from winning the peace. The Arab determination for revenge burns to this day.

Early military success should not end American diplomacy. After the initial bombing successes, the United States can afford to announce a bombing pause and see if further conflict can be avoided.

---

*Charles William Maynes is editor of* Foreign Policy.

## PETER WEISS

If the first casualty of war is truth, the second is dialogue. John Cheever, in the midst of another war, wrote in his journal: "People who favor the war in Asia drive with their lights on. . . . I find something menacing in this mute and anonymous means of communication. One takes a stand—makes a threat—but the face is never seen, and nothing, of course, is said." Yellow ribbons.

If dialogue could somehow be restored this is what ought to be said:

War is the continuation of cost accounting by other means. Before this war started, many people drew up balance sheets showing that its costs were certain to exceed its benefits by far. Now that it is more than one month old, with no end in sight, their calculations are more relevant than ever. When the fat's in the fire, you can go up in flames singing of victory over the infidels or you can reach for the fire extinguisher.

If the war continues, the costs will include tens of thousands dead or maimed, Saddam made into a martyr of the Arab and Islamic masses, a big chunk of Mother Earth reduced to oily rubble, the peace dividend gone, the cause of Israeli-Palestinian peace set back indefinitely, fundamentalism triumphant abroad, militarism and repression rampant at home.

And for what? To get Iraq out of Kuwait, of course. A laudable purpose, but one that can be achieved at far smaller cost:

§ Declare that the real purpose of the war, the virtual destruction of Saddam's CBN capability and the infliction of severe and long-lasting damage to Iraq's armed forces and infrastructure, has already been achieved.

§ Stop all fighting, except for limited defensive action if Saddam refuses to agree to a cease-fire.

§ Offer to refrain from further attacks on Iraq and to lift the embargo on civilian goods—leaving the embargo on military goods and technology in place—in return for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait.

§ If this offer is refused, maintain the sanctions for all but humanitarian medical and food supplies.

§ Convene one, three, a dozen conferences dealing with all the problems of the region, not just those on Saddam's agenda: the mutual elimination of weapons of mass destruction; the gradual demilitarization of the region; democracy, human rights and development; self-determination for the Palestinians; recognition of Israel within secure borders; and all this with maximum participation from the people of the region, with a substantial security and technical assistance role for the U.N. and with no, or minimal, U.S. interference.

Would it work? Maybe. Will Bush's policy of war to the finish? Only at horrendous cost. Given the choice between a sure loser and a possible winner, which would you pick?

---

*Peter Weiss chairs the Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy.*

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## ROBERT C. JOHANSEN

To end the gulf war and construct a lasting peace we need to change two attitudes. First, we must discourage good guys/bad guys thinking. To perceive U.S. and Iraqi policies, respectively, as the embodiment of good and evil prolongs the war. As a corrective, U.S. citizens might recall that Washington chose not to condemn Iraq's aggression against Iran a decade ago and indeed aided Saddam Hussein thereafter; did little to discourage Saddam's use of chemical weapons; refused to support confidential diplomatic efforts by Egypt to ban weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East after the Iran-Iraq war; rejected a comprehensive ban on the testing of nuclear weapons while complaining that Iraq, among others, might test and develop them; and violated the prohibition against aggression it now claims to honor, by sending troops to the Middle East.

Second, recognizing that a false good/bad dichotomy cannot serve as the basis for self-righteously rejecting negotiations, the United States should initiate negotiations based on a clear distinction between upholding principles and compromising interests. To be sure, Saddam's invasion of Kuwait was wrong. But are we to refuse to negotiate with anyone who has done something wrong? During negotiations the President can compromise interests where prudent to do so, without compromising the principle that aggression is wrong.

Bush, Congress and the public must calculate the cost of face-saving devices, such as enabling Iraq to lease port facilities from Kuwait. Only if they conclude that the political and economic costs of such incentives are greater than the moral cost of potential deaths and injuries can they decline to negotiate. Such calculations are not easy. But it is politically irresponsible and morally wrong to pretend that *any* face-saving incentive inflicts a greater cost on the United States than the deaths of its sons and daughters.

With a change in attitude in these two areas, the following steps should be taken:

§ Implement an immediate cease-fire. Uphold the nonaggression principle by maintaining economic sanctions until Iraq leaves Kuwait. By unilaterally halting the bombardment of Iraq, Washington would deprive Saddam of his major source of support: the belief that he holds high the banners of Islam and of Arabs against an unwanted Western role in the Middle East. Sanctions without war would encourage more Iraqis to see the folly of Saddam's annexation.

§ Withdraw U.S. soldiers from Saudi Arabia now that the mission of reducing Saddam's ability to launch aggression has been accomplished, and introduce United Nations peacekeeping forces to patrol the lines between Iraqi troops and Saudi Arabia. Desertions from disgruntled, poorly supplied Iraqi armed forces might even accelerate should the bombing cease, and deserters could surrender to U.N. peacekeepers.

§ Hold negotiations to consider Iraqi port facilities and to arrange impartial adjudication for disputed oilfields.

§ Hold parallel if unlinked negotiations to end Israeli military occupation of the West Bank in accordance with U.N. resolutions. Thoughtful members of Congress might point out that linkage between the Iraqi and the Israeli occupations has been inadvertently underscored by the Administration in claiming that U.S. troops moved into the gulf to uphold the principle of resisting aggression. If it is wrong for Iraq to occupy Kuwait, then it is wrong for Israel to occupy the West Bank. To say that the interests of Palestinians should be taken less seriously than the interests of Kuwaitis shatters U.S. credibility. Negotiations over the West Bank must include international guarantees for Israel's security as the region is given compelling incentives to move toward abolition of all weapons of mass destruction.

§ Use the money saved by ending the war to rebuild the blighted communities in the United States to which many soldiers will return. Divert additional military spending to help rebuild the areas in Iraq and Kuwait where people subject to a ruthless dictator's folly suffered from allied bombs.

---

*Robert C. Johansen is professor of peace and world order studies at the University of Notre Dame.*

## RICHARD FALK

Saddam Hussein and George Bush would each benefit, although in different ways, from ending the war at this stage. Each is likely to lose heavily, again in different ways, by persisting. By stopping now, Bush would be credited with victory achieved by a skillful combination of coalition politics and technological mastery that

(*Continued on Page 271*)

★

## RESPITE

*Domestically, poor Bush was in the loo.*
*The budget mess, recession and a stew*
*Of problems—drugs and health care, to name two—*
*Gave evidence that Bush's White House crew*
*Had not a clue of what to do.*

*Now news shows show no homeless on a grate.*
*They show our triumphs as we devastate*
*Iraq with weapons all appreciate.*
*Because Bush went to war to free Kuwait,*
*He has a great approval rate.*

*But when we show Saddam Hussein the door,*
*We'll still have problems here we can't ignore.*
*In fact, by then we could have many more.*
*The White House, just as baffled as before,*
*Might have to score another war.*

*Calvin Trillin*

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# BEAT THE DEVIL.

## Military Precision

Cogito ergo sum. I aim, therefore you are (a military target). Technology in the service of morality spoke out once more in Defense Secretary Cheney's tranquil affirmation that yes, two missiles had been targeted on the air-raid shelter in Baghdad and had struck their target with great "precision." In Saudi Arabia, Brig. Gen. Richard Neal spoke proudly of the "active bunker-busting campaign" and, when prompted to express compassion for the hundreds of dead women and children, continued after a nanosecond of *pro forma* regret to insist that this was a "legitimate target, attacked by professional officers." This is the verbal and spiritual environment of mass murder, of war crimes.

Both CNN and CBS jigged promptly to the piper's tune. CNN's Charles Bierbauer cut from Bush's publicist to Cheney to Cheney's publicist, Blitzer, all in their various ways asserting the virtuous nature of the bombardment. CBS began with the claims of the U.S. military, went immediately to further U.S. military propaganda relayed by Susan Spencer from Saudi Arabia, showed a smoking building but no bodies and ended with retired Gen. Michael Dugan confiding that he was "absolutely lost as to why civilians were in that facility" and advising viewers to "put it in context."

By contrast ABC's Bill Blakemore sent powerful coverage of the horrible scene outside the shelter and was not—as happened with CNN—speedily undercut by ensuing commentary. ("And so, Charles, a note of hope amid this carnage here in Hiroshima. Perhaps now the Japanese people will see what their leaders have brought on them, and peace will be one day closer. This is . . .")

Kublai Khan's brother Ulagu, who finished off Baghdad in 1258, used Mongol "precision" in destroying the irrigation system that was the basis of Abbasid civilization and hence its military capacity. At the beginning of this century the archeologist Gertrude Bell attributed the desolation of the area round Tikrit, birthplace of Saddam Hussein as well as of Saladin, to those Mongol attacks on the hydraulic culture of Iraq six centuries earlier. Today the United States is following and expanding the plan of Ulagu, smashing the water and sewage infrastructure of the country, which means that many thousands of people, particularly children, will die from germ warfare of a very effective sort.

Everything is a potential target. Soldiers need water and use roads and breathe air, such as that now irradiated from the two research reactors at Tuwaitha, bombed on January 17 in the first such attack in history on working reactors (a breach of the Geneva conventions), which could have released up to 3 percent of the contamination from Chernobyl, quite a dollop. Last week, as correspondent for *The Independent*, my brother Patrick visited al-Nasiriyeh, on the Euphrates between Baghdad and Basra, encountering en route two buses, a taxi and a car all strafed on the edge of town, with casualties being removed. An hour later in the hospital he saw the body of 10-year-old Ahmed Kassim, head torn open by shrapnel as he traveled with his family in a car fleeing the bombing. In the corridor was a Bedouin shepherd carrying a son wounded while tending a flock. He and the flock had been strafed, with ten sheep dead. Wool for soldiers?

Patrick and other journalists saw the bridge of al-Nasir, struck at 3 P.M. when it was abnormally crowded with civilians (at least forty-seven dead), since the pedestrian bridge had already been bombed. Roads are, by definition, military targets because trucks and soldiers might use them, as are, by the same logic, schools and hospitals. In the old days "total war" meant attacking persons and objects designated as "civilian." All that's happened now is that the word "military" has been substituted, to make everyone except the Iraqis sleep better at night.

Schwarzkopf has said that he and his colleagues are ethical people and would never target civilians. In 1986 Gen. John Galvin of the U.S. Southern Command told Fred Kaplan of *The Boston Globe* that the *contras* (under U.S. government direction, remember) were opting for "soft targets," that is civilians, rather than "duking it out" with the Sandinistas. As Ron Ridenhour once said to me apropos the lessons of My Lai, "The motherfuckers will do anything."

And talking of doing anything, we should note that the Pentagon has said it's taking the Al Rashid Hotel off the target list, even though it conceals a military command center. This is where Western journalists stay. ABC's Blakemore said that no military activity had ever been discerned there. The Pentagon insists that deep, deep down lurks an enemy presence. The truth is nearer the surface. ABC, CNN and other journalists are doing Saddam's work, are therefore military targets. I've long expected the Al Rashid to be hit, and the Pentagon's implicit threat confirms the fear. The U.S. government had recommended that U.S. journalists and TV crews leave Iraq before January 15; with the exception of CNN they all did, many under editorial order in a spectacular example of anticipatory self-censorship and timidity. Journalists from Britain and elsewhere defied their editors and stayed. John Simpson was ordered by the director general of the BBC to leave, and promptly said he would resign and supply material on a freelance basis. The director general backed down.

## The Approaching Battle

The war's outcome as envisaged by Western commanders is simple enough: beleaguered Iraqi troops surrendering en bloc in and above Kuwait; the Republican Guard farther north shattered by air assaults as it swings west to meet the advancing U.S. infantry, poised on the highway to Baghdad, the route of Muslim invaders from Hejaz in the seventh century.

How might the ground plan fare? From information surviving censorship in Saudi Arabia a somber picture emerges of poor liaison, dubious equipment, badly prepared troops. The targets keenly anticipated by Kuwaiti Special Forces (no doubt fortified with promises of Kuwaiti citizenship denied them in the pre-invasion era) will not be Iraqi soldiers but Palestinian residents of Kuwait. Asked by Robert Fisk of *The Independent* what the fate of those residents would be, a Kuwaiti soldier drew his thumb across his throat, evoking the slaughters of Sabra and Shatila.

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

But Kuwait will most likely be vigorously contested, house by house, and just as the battle there could bog down, so too could the U.S. rush toward the rivers northwest of Basra come to grief. The very moment U.S. troops cross the border, tensions in the Arab and Islamic world, particularly in Iran, will multiply. Iraqis will be fighting on their native soil, which itself will be unforgiving as the troops enter the marshy and difficult terrain near the rivers, where the British Army met defeat at Kut in 1916.

The impending battle will be as heavy with significance as such other great historical clashes as Marathon and Salamis, where Hellenic force of arms prevailed over Persian expansionism in the fifth century B.C., securing a civilization that ultimately engendered the fractured syntax and repulsive political morals of George Bush.

It will be a battle, after all, about dominance in the capitalist world. To the leaders of the United States and Britain the most painful sight of last summer was that of German Chancellor Helmut Kohl clasping hands with the President of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev, on July 16. Here was their geostrategic nightmare: a Reich supervising the economic destiny of Europe (and reaching out to Saddam); and, farther east, the old Axis ally Japan ascendant throughout Asia and securely lodged in the American heartland. Here was the Soviet Union suppliant to Kohl; two weeks later, just as the United States was adjusting itself to the new world disorder, the start of history, the unvarnished struggle for control of world markets and resources against Germany and Japan, at that very moment Iraq seemed to menace one of the strategic redoubts—Saudi Arabia.

It is assumed in all Western commentaries that the U.S. and its allies must prevail. But it is not so long since 100,000 Iranian troops got within eyeshot of Basra, never reached their objective and lost half their number. Is there any reason to suppose that the West's victory is inevitable? In fact, an Iraqi triumph is conceivable, with the U.S. advance halted, the attack on Kuwait stalled, the casualties and reverses mounting at a rate beyond the power of military censors to suppress.

Claims of "tank kills" by briefing officers in Saudi Arabia are indubitably as specious as most other military and journalistic assessments of the foe. It has, for example, become Holy Writ that the Republican Guard is the elite of Iraq's fighting force. Yet victory in the war against Iran was achieved by regular army units. The West's admiration of the Guard merely echoes Saddam Hussein's determination to give his personal army the credit for beating Iran, thus reflecting greater glory on his own person.

There are signs that the White House is beginning to feel that victory may not be assured, or will be too costly. On February 12, for the first time since the August invasion both *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe* gave prominence to Iraq's statement, post–Primakov visit, that it is prepared to work with the Soviet Union and other nations and agencies in the interest of finding a peaceful solution to the crisis. There is nothing here that Iraq has not been saying since August. The question to ask is Why now should the statement become front-page news?

## Mr. Jelly Lord

When Secretary General Pérez de Cuéllar returned from Baghdad on January 14 claiming Saddam Hussein's obduracy, war was inevitable. Only in the past week did the transcript of his session with Saddam become public, as did the confidential report of his trip rendered to the Security Council. The Iraqis requested that the transcript be made part of the formal U.N. record. Such request denied as breaching "confidentiality," the transcript was published on February 9 in the Jordanian newspaper *al-Dustour.*

Nora Boustany's dispatch from Amman to *The Washington Post* on February 12 was headlined "Transcript Shows Saddam Rejecting Pullout in Talks With Perez de Cuellar." Boustany highlighted remarks by Saddam from the transcript such as "To utter the word 'withdrawal' while there is still a chance for war means that we would be creating the psychological conditions for enemy victory over us."

By contrast the London *Guardian*'s report of the same transcript was headlined "Saddam was prepared to agree deal on Kuwait" and pointed out that while Saddam was saying he could not use the word "withdrawal" at that point in the crisis, he was prepared to embark on diplomatic negotiation, and withdrawal was an option. He lectured de Cuéllar on what portions of Kuwait, near the border, had formerly been Iraq's, while at the same time signally failing to assert a claim to the whole of Kuwait. He also charged that U.N. resolutions were U.S. resolutions, to which de Cuéllar responded, "I support you as far as the issue concerns me." But in his report to the Security Council on January 14, de Cuéllar suppressed the details of territorial discussion. By that point he had abdicated all initiative, having been party to one of the most resolute betrayals of the purposes of the Charter since the founding of the United Nations.

## It's Mourning in America Again

George Bush said he "mourned" U.S. casualties, though he refused such compassion to Iraqis slain by U.S. bombs. Earlier, his publicists revealed he was "at peace with himself." This allegation of moral catatonia is intended to be soothing to public opinion, as opposed to disclosure that the President was consumed by inner doubt at launching a war in which thousands of innocent people would die. Saddam, according to General Schwarzkopf in one radio report I heard, has three psychiatrists in constant attendance, as well as three "doubles" designed to throw would-be assassins off the track. The *Irish Press* reports that two of the doubles have been executed for security reasons, more evidence of Saddam's inability to delegate responsibility.

This business of Bush "mourning" reminds me of Lenny Bruce's joke about the Pope, who was reported to have cried after news of a rail crash in Italy. "The Pope cried," Bruce would say with incredulity and admiration. "*The Pope cried.* Why, any other Pope would have laughed himself sick."

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# BELTWAY BANDITS.

DAVID CORN

## ■ How to Profit Off the War

Washington at war: Bomb-sniffing dogs patrol the hedges that surround Congressional buildings, and the Senate stationery store is doing a brisk business in flags. Otherwise, it's mostly business as usual on Capitol Hill. On a recent weekday morning, the third-floor hallway of the Dirksen Senate Office Building was filled with men in dark business suits, and a few women similarly attired, standing in a long row outside a stuffed-to-capacity committee room. Many of the power-suit crowd represented various energy interests and were clamoring to see Senator Bennett Johnston, the Louisiana Democrat who chairs the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, unveil his latest energy bill—the craftily named National Energy Security Act.

"This war with Iraq is because of oil," drawled Johnston in introducing a package that reads like the wish list of those industry lobbyists. It would, for example, permit oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. (In 1989 Johnston steered similar legislation through his committee but was undone when the Exxon Valdez took its wrong turn eight days later.) Other prominent features of the bill include revamped licensing procedures for nuclear power plants, which limit citizen input, and development of nuclear technology. Absent are any provisions on nuclear waste, a matter Johnston dodges because it is "filibuster bait." The bill would also encourage new coal technology and natural gas use. It reserves shortest shrift for renewable energy, urging expansion of a modest program that promotes the export of alternative energy technology.

Johnston, to make Arctic drilling more acceptable, tied funding for all the bill's programs to revenues that would be produced by the Alaska operation. His committee estimates the annual federal share to be $1.8 billion—that's if there is any oil, for, as even Johnston notes, it is unclear how much black gold lies beneath the ice. Johnston's legislation would also hand to the Secretary of Energy the decision on how to divvy the billions among the nuclear, coal, natural gas and renewable energy programs.

There's more. Johnston claims the legislation would produce new fuel economy standards for automobiles. But the package does not establish a specific miles-per-gallon standard. Instead, it requires the Secretary of Transportation to set the maximum feasible standards—but to do so for a fleet of cars that matches the size, mix and performance of the 1990 fleet, which happens to include a greater proportion of gas-guzzling, high-performance cars than in previous years. Given such parameters, the department is unlikely to come up with a standard much higher than the current 27.5 m.p.g. Johnston is unwilling to put the squeeze on Detroit in his search for security.

## ■ Fill 'er Up and Send in the Troops

An antidote to Johnston's deft exploitation of the war—how many legislators are going to vote against "energy security" and drilling in Alaska while Americans are dying overseas for oil and other lofty principles?—is a bill sponsored by Senator Richard Bryan. His legislation would compel auto makers who sell cars in the United States to produce fleets that average 34.4 m.p.g. by 1996 and 40.2 m.p.g. by 2001. Bryan figures that such standards would lead to savings of 48 billion gallons of fuel in the first six years of this new m.p.g. order. Last September, as U.S. troops sat in the Saudi desert, forty-two senators, including Johnston, successfully prevented Bryan from ending debate on the bill, thus smothering it.

Bryan needs only to find a few more senators willing to stand up to the auto makers. In the House, proponents of the 40 m.p.g. standard confront a harder task, thanks to Representative John Dingell, lord of the powerful Energy and Commerce Committee. Last session he single-handedly killed a 40 m.p.g. bill. During a hearing on the measure in September, Dingell trounced one of its champions, Representative Barbara Boxer. He berated her and then asked what type of car her husband drives. A Porsche, she answered, to howls from the audience of auto executives. Dingell's bullying performance had a strategic effect. When an environmental lobbyist recently asked a prominent House liberal to take a lead in supporting stricter fuel standards, the squeamish lawmaker demurred with the excuse: "Everyone knows what Dingell did to Boxer." For the record, Dingell voted to allow Bush to initiate the war, as did Johnston.

## ■ How Many Watts Are There in 1,000 Points of Light?

During his State of the Union Message, President Bush announced he had devised a "comprehensive national energy strategy" that included energy conservation. He should read the fine print of his budget. The total budget authority for energy conservation programs in fiscal 1991 will be about $465 million. Bush's 1992 budget request is $296 million. As for solar and renewable energy programs, the 1991 level is about $208 million. The new budget asks for $202 million.

The document recently released by the White House and put forward as a national energy "plan" is equally neglectful of alternative energy. Bush dropped some decent proposals that had been recommended by the Department of Energy, including efficient lighting standards and tax credits for the production of renewable energy. He also vanquished a D.O.E. proposal that purchasers of cars averaging 35 m.p.g. receive a rebate, to be financed by a tax levied on autos that need more gas. Bush also seconds Johnston's call for Alaska drilling and new rules to inhibit public comment on nuclear power plants before they are turned on. Finally, the Bush plan contains not one measure aimed at reducing gasoline consumption—surprising since one would assume White House propagandists could see the value in doing so.

President Jimmy Carter once called the energy crisis the "moral equivalent of war" and ordered solar panels installed on top of the White House. Commander in Chief Bush hasn't the stomach for this kind of war, and today those panels—taken down during the Reagan-Bush years—gather dust in a government warehouse in suburban Virginia.

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# ARTICLES.

LETTER FROM YUGOSLAVIA

# Living in a Le Carré Novel

SLAVENKA DRAKULIĆ

*Zagreb*

I feel dizzy. I suffer from nausea. I have a headache as soon as I open my eyes in the morning. My heart beats too quickly. I perspire and choke—sometimes I think I'll suffocate, since there is not enough air. I am afraid to open newspapers, watch TV or listen to the radio. I don't dare go outside at night. I have bad dreams. And yet I don't visit my doctor. I know there is no cure for my disease, because I simply suffer from the *symptoms of living here*, in a country where even mother's milk is poisoned by politics.

On the surface, everything seems normal. Streetcars are running, people go to work, schools and hospitals are open. But ominous events have been taking place. The Republic of Slovenia passed a referendum declaring its right to secede. Croatia adopted a new Constitution proclaiming its sovereignty. And most recently, the army has threatened a coup.

*The army started rattling its tanks and helicopters, threatening to confiscate the illegal arms directly.*

It seems clear to me now that the symptoms I describe are closely connected with a dangerous and contagious disease that has been developing for some time and spreading in the past couple of years, until no part of this land is spared: It is nationalism, a very specific illness, perhaps characteristic of the Balkans. The disease is shaking the whole country so hard that with every passing day we are further from a remedy, if there is any. For thirty-five years Tito, the Communist Party and the army held Yugoslavia together. Crushed and melted in their iron embrace, Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Bosnians, Herzegovinians, Albanians, etc. were ready to recognize the "truth" that in this Arcadia there is no nationalism, only brotherhood and unity. When Tito died eleven years ago, *The Economist* predicted that Yugoslavia would split apart within a year. It was wrong. It took a good ten years, because after Tito died, the Communist Party was still alive. God knows what would have happened if the revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe hadn't helped the process along (although they didn't in Serbia). But the third leg of the "iron triangle," the Yugoslav People's Army, is still alive and well. Until now, it was only a wicked presumption of the Croats and the Serbs that the army favored a "Serbian solution" because 80 percent of the commanding cadre are Serbs—that is, retaining the federal and centralized structure of the country as opposed to a confederation of republic-states decentralized to the point of secession, the solution preferred by Croatia and Slovenia. In this country the army has always played an important political role, and no one doubted it would try to continue to play one, despite its proclaimed depoliticization. But not until January did it become apparent that the army is the joker in the federalists' pack—a very dangerous card.

On January 9, the federal presidency announced a ten-day deadline for all illegally armed paramilitary groups and individuals in Yugoslavia to turn in their weapons. However, it was clear that this ultimatum was aimed primarily at the Croatian police reserve, which has been accused by the federal presidency of being armed illegally. The Croatian government rejected this accusation, saying that every sovereign state has the right to arm its police, that it had done so according to the Constitution and that the terrorist groups in Knin, if anyone, should be disarmed first. (Last August, Serbs in Croatia, under the influence of nationalists in Serbia, claimed that their minority rights were imperiled after the election of the new Croatian government, and in protest committed a series of terrorist actions around the town of Knin and proclaimed their autonomy.) On the other hand, the Croatian authorities' intention to constitute the Croatian police as a parallel, republican army was evident. Everyone knew that underlying this ultimatum of the federal presidency was a more important and more dangerous dispute about the legality of the new Croatian non-Communist government, installed after the first free elections were held last April, which the Serbian Communist leader Slobodan Milosevic and the army regarded as a threat to the centralized federal system.

Most Yugoslavs, accustomed to political games at the top, didn't pay much attention to the ultimatum. They started to pay attention to it only recently, when salt, sugar and flour couldn't be found in any of the stores here, not even for pancakes. I admit that this frightened me more than the rumors about tanks being sent in—it was more real. And while I could understand why people were hoarding flour, oil and sugar, salt I didn't understand. When a friend's grandmother bought twenty-five kilos of salt, I asked her, Why so much? "Because you can sell it later, or trade it for food," answered the 87-year-old lady, who had survived two world wars. My God, are we coming to this? I thought, opening a kitchen closet and staring at my one-pound store of salt (because salted food is unhealthy!), no sugar and no flour (because they make you fat!), and a little vegetable oil.

Before the deadline, some 200 rifles were returned to the police station—peanuts compared with the automatic rifles, variously estimated at from 20,000 to 80,000, that supposedly

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have been imported illegally, mainly from Hungary (Hungary admitted the export of 10,000 weapons). The presidency (or I should say the army, because by then it was clear that this decision was made under very strong army pressure) thought so too. The government angrily extended the deadline two more days. The army started rattling its tanks and helicopters, threatening to confiscate the illegal arms directly, which sounded like a threat of a military coup. Still the arms were not turned in.

Croat leaders made speeches psychologically preparing their people for resistance to the army, for civil war. On January 22 and 23, army maneuvers in Croatia were reported. Buses, trains and trucks were posted as barricades at the bridges and entrances to the city of Zagreb. On the evening of January 24, tensions were at a peak. Nobody could be sure that the political games wouldn't involve bloodshed. Nobody slept, the streets were empty, the president of Parliament called an extraordinary session for the next day. Television and radio broadcast news bulletins all night.

But as the longest night in recent history passed, the tension eased and it became clear that the army wouldn't attack, at least not that night. In the morning, after attending the stormy session of Parliament where deputies unanimously called people to arms to defend the sovereignty of Croatia, President Franjo Tudjman, who had previously decided not to attend a scheduled meeting with Serbian leader Milosevic "because in this situation it doesn't make any sense," changed his mind and went to Belgrade, realizing that talks were the only way to overcome the biggest crisis yet in relations between the two republics.

In the meantime, the collective federal presidency was in session, and the federal Prime Minister held a Cabinet meeting. In the late evening Tudjman issued a statement announcing a "historic decision": The federal presidency, including the representative of the army, had recognized the Croatian government for the first time in its eight months of existence. The representatives of the republics agreed that the talks at the top about the future of Yugoslavia should continue. The army took the troops off the highest state of alert. We were relieved—but not for long. Everything that followed was not politics but a first-rate spy novel. The day after a cheerful President Tudjman returned from Belgrade, the whole country found itself in the middle of a John le Carré novel. And while it is a very interesting position to be in, it gives one an extremely uneasy feeling.

That Saturday evening, the 26th, Croatian TV broadcast a supposed documentary on the "illegal armament of Croatia." The forty-minute movie was produced by Zastava Film, the army film company. It showed Croatian Defense Minister Martin Spegelj explaining the illegal importation of arms from Hungary and tactics for attacking army officers and soldiers in the event of civil war. What shook the TV audience, and then the entire country—apart from the question of whether the documentary was true—was the words the Minister used. He talked about execution of army officers in their apartments, along with their wives and children; extermination of Serbs in Knin; assassination of unreliable people; secret lists of people to be killed; liquidation squads. The movie was murky, without close-ups and with a soundtrack so poor that certain words and phrases were unintelligible. (The text was transcribed and run as subtitles.)

Minister Spegelj immediately released a statement saying that phrases and words had been inserted into his speech. He accused the army of manipulating public opinion because the documentary had been broadcast on Serbian TV while talks between Tudjman and Milosevic were still going on.

But the top Croat politicians and their advisers apparently didn't coordinate their statements, because President Tudjman's security adviser said that same evening, in a discussion after the movie, that Spegelj was aware that he was being filmed and said what he did on purpose, to send disinformation to army headquarters. To add a dramatic note to the already surreal plot, that same night, after recognizing himself in the movie, a man who had collaborated, perhaps unwillingly, with army intelligence killed himself in front of his wife and friends.

The Croatian media were silent for two days, publishing only Spegelj's statements and waiting for a decision by the

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Croatian government on his guilt or innocence. The Serbian media had already proclaimed him guilty and called not only for his resignation but for his arrest. The point is that the Croatian and Serbian media took the sides of their governments, and, unlike the press in a democratic country, they didn't show even a minimum of professionalism or investigative spirit. Rather than being journalists, they acted like parrots.

As the story progressed, the people realized that they were only extras in the movie of le Carré's novel, directed by Francis Ford Coppola. The next scene took place at the Zagreb airport on Monday, January 28: We saw President Tudjman on his way to Vienna, saying a joyful farewell to his beleaguered Minister Spegelj. So it seemed that nothing more needed to be said. However, on Tuesday evening Croatian TV broadcast an interview with Spegelj so he could defend himself publicly. But the interviewer didn't dare ask him what should have been asked, so the key questions were left hanging in the air and the Minister departed, leaving the impression that he had handled an extremely difficult and sensitive political situation with too much self-assurance, almost with arrogance.

And then, while Croatian TV was preparing "smashing" proof that the movie was falsified, the army prosecutor issued a warrant to arrest Spegelj for "armed mutiny." The Croatian government and a civil prosecutor answered that the army had no authority to issue such a warrant, and, besides, Spegelj was innocent; he was only performing his duties as Defense Minister. The next day the Croatian delegation walked out of a meeting of the federal presidency. The day after that, Croatian TV broadcast another episode in the drama, showing another person from the incriminating movie who claimed that he was forced to collaborate with army espionage and that in the movie he was saying what he was told to say. The federal presidency said that the army will go to the end. A week later there was another failed attempt to settle the problem peacefully.

As I write this, we are totally victimized by homogenization. There is no possibility anymore of acting or speaking publicly or privately as anything but a Croat or a Serb. All differences—political, ideological, individual—are swept away by the danger of "outside enemies." In a truly democratic country, in spite of pressures and dangers, it would be normal for the opposition to jump on the Spegelj case in an attempt to gain some points for itself in future elections. Not in Croatia. Here the parliamentary opposition (ex-Communists, liberals, social democrats) is giving its support to the central government, i.e., the ruling party, proving that the totalitarian mentality lasts longer than the totalitarian system.

Another consequence of the crisis is the suspension of democracy on all levels. The two most important questions about the controversial movie are: Where did money for importing the arms, legal or illegal, come from? And did the Croatian Parliament know about and approve such an expenditure? These two questions haven't even been asked—not by the opposition, not by journalists, not by the general public. This silence, more than anything, shows where we are and how far the pollution of fear, hate, nationalism and war has advanced. Because the harm has been done already; the ground for civil war has been prepared. We are not only poisoned by politics;

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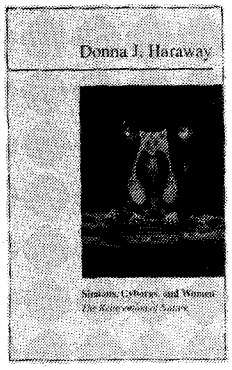


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it is now our only and ultimate reality. This country is playing a game of Russian roulette, but while the pistol is in the hands of those in power, it is aimed at our heads. □

ABOUT THOSE HEADLINES

# Confessions of 'Baghdad Betty'

MARGOT KIDDER

Dear Mummy,

You wanted to know what on earth happened that made your daughter the subject of the headlines you read in the papers calling her "Baghdad Betty," saying "Superman's Gal Supports Iraq." I really don't know, Mum. In the face of the morbid reality of our times it seems asinine for anyone's exasperation to be directed toward an out-of-context soundbite.

On January 21, when the war was five days old, I attended a press conference organized by the Campaign for Peace in the Middle East in support of eleven Americans who had placed their sense of morality above their need for comformity or job security. Each one of them articulated what it was in their lives that made them feel compelled to "come out" publicly against the war in the Persian Gulf, in spite of the fervid patriotism that is vacuuming up dissent in this country.

Among the group of eleven was Yolanda Huet-Vaughn, a physician and a captain in the Army Reserve Medical Corps who refused orders to participate in what she considers "an immoral, inhumane and unconstitutional act, namely an offensive military mobilization in the Middle East"; Charles Rangel of New York, one of three Congressmen who endorsed the march on Washington; a rabbi; the subdean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine; and a fellow whose brother is serving in the gulf.

These were not the voices of naïve flakes or ill-informed and unpatriotic Americans, believe me; they were the compassionate and reasoned voices of men and women standing firm on high moral ground and begging to be heard. But the press chose to ignore them; instead, they chose to focus on me.

We all made our statements, and all of us reiterated that we were supporting the troops by trying to bring them home, preferably alive. This is what you have to preface any antiwar statements with these days, as if by uttering those words you're going to ease the burden of the people doing the actual fighting. After each of us had spoken, the small press conference was opened for questions. Rangel was smart enough to leave.

There was an antagonistic fellow in the front row who asked me if the polls stating that 81 percent of Americans supported the war didn't influence me at all. When I answered no, and pointed out to him that the 81 percent seemed to be for the war only if nobody died in it, he changed tactics and challenged my antiwar stance in light of Iraq's refusal to abide by the Geneva conventions in its treatment of allied prisoners, specifically Article 13, which states that it is a violation of the accord to humiliate prisoners of war or parade them in public.

It seemed only logical to surmise that if there is a rule of war saying it is against the Geneva accords to humiliate prisoners or parade them in public, there ought to be a rule of war suggesting that it isn't very nice to bomb little children and blow their arms and legs off. I said as much, and many of the people in the room applauded. Then, after chatting with Yolanda, I went home.

CBS radio had sent a reporter to the press conference, but in their broadcast they ignored everything about it except some of my words about the children, which they sliced out of context and presented on the air as an intended insult to the prisoners of war. Apparently their switchboard lit up within minutes with hundreds of calls from enraged citizens, who felt I deserved a fate worse than death. One of the callers said he was planning an anti–Margot Kidder rally, the first of its kind that I know of and a most peculiar way to contribute to the war effort.

The next day the *New York Post*, which is sort of like a daily *National Enquirer*, wrote a dimwitted and distorted piece about my antiwar stance and promptly sent it out on the wire service, where it was picked up around the world and reprinted as God's own truth. "Superman's Girl Defends Iraqis" screamed the London *Daily Mail*. The fact that the *Post* had not sent a reporter to the press conference didn't seem to matter to anyone.

I was home sleeping through most of this. The first clue that something was wrong came the next morning in the form of a phone call from Plan International U.S.A. canceling a taping session the next Monday and politely asking if I was planning to continue speaking out against the war, and if so, would I please understand that the Plan could not afford to have someone so "political" representing them.

Next came calls from a couple of friends who lovingly suggested that I keep my mouth shut on the ground that inviting the hatred of an entire country was not a good career move. Then more calls and faxes from just about everyone who had my number, many of them much less than friendly, and requests from several TV stations for "exclusive" interviews. Finally my girlfriend Rosie called and read me the article in the *Post* over the phone. I felt like some infectious germ. My Lord, I'm fucking *Lois Lane*. Am I that dangerous?

It wasn't until I appeared on *Good Day New York* that I heard the treasonous soundbite: "It's not all right to humiliate political prisoners, but it is all right to bomb cities, cut off their water supply and kill children. Frankly, give me a break." It was the "give me a break" that did me in. I had barely managed to explain that if we were to insist on Iraq adhering to the Geneva conventions then we should adhere to the article in the Nuremberg "accords or whatever" that says it is wrong to bomb civilian targets or cause undue human suffering, before the host of the show, an ex-marine, moved in

*Margot Kidder is an actress.*

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for the attack with all the subtlety of a rabid pit bull.

Didn't Saddam Hussein have to be stopped? Shouldn't he be punished for his act of aggression in invading Kuwait? Hadn't we learned anything from World War II? Well, I said, I think it's a bit disrespectful to all the Jews who died in World War II to insinuate that we were dealing with a problem of that magnitude (he meant no disrespect, he said; neither had I, I said), but perhaps the one thing we have learned from all wars is that there are no winners and that war's first victims are always the children. The host made it abundantly clear that this was not the answer of a responsible adult.

Minutes later on a Washington call-in show I found myself talking to a wall explaining to the lady in my earphone why I didn't consider it an insult to be called "the Jane Fonda of the nineties." And later still, on the street, a man yelled at me that I'd better study my history, it was the Nuremberg trials I meant. Nuremberg *principles*, I shot back, but his anger bothered me in spite of my pretense of arrogance.

It is most uncomfortable to stand out in a crowd when the crowd hates you. The self-righteousness of nationalism tolerates little criticism. "You are the first turncoat and we will never forget that," said one of the letters in my mailbox.

I met up with Yolanda that afternoon, and we swapped stories that reflected our growing paranoia. She'd done the *Sally Jessy Raphael* show the day before, and when she'd brought up the fact that it was the United States that had sold most of Saddam's chemical and biological weapons to him, Sally Jessy went berserk and started screaming, "Get out of here! Give me that microphone and get off my stage! This is MY show, get out of here!" Later we both checked into the Parker Meridien hotel under assumed names, she because she was a fugitive from justice and I because I wished I was someone else.

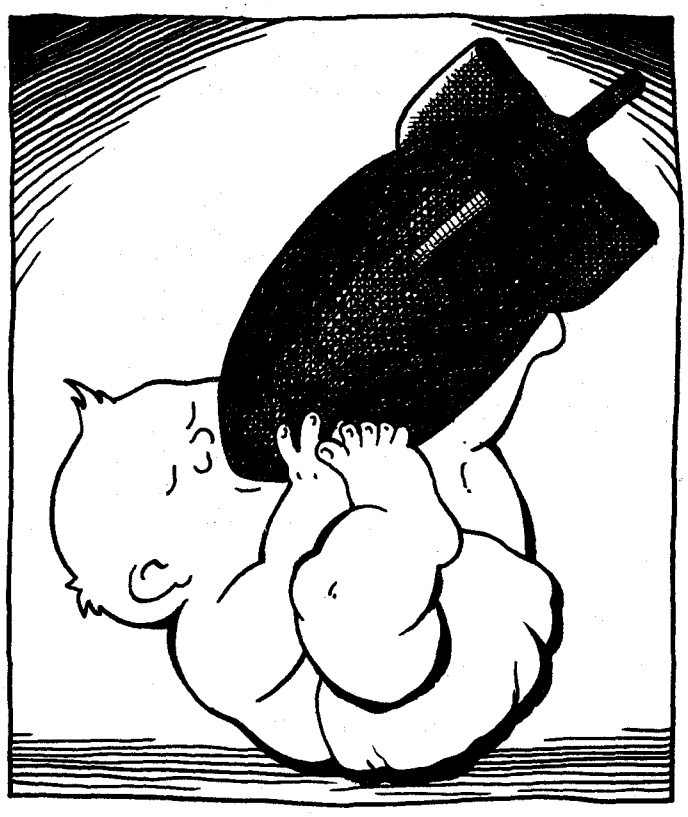
When Yolanda and I appeared on CBS's *This Morning* the next day I was too cowardly to invite any more anger so I focused only on the children who are going to be the victims of this war, thinking that no one could attack a person for speaking out on behalf of civilians and children. I was wrong. The night before I'd received a fax from Doug Hostetter of Fellowship of Reconciliation, who'd received a fax stating that a certain retired General Opel, a member of the German Parliament, estimated there were up to 300,000 casualties in Iraq and Kuwait, more than 100,000 in Baghdad alone, and that his figures were based on information he'd received from someone in the U.S. military. I had Yolanda read it on the air because she had more credibility than I, she being a doctor and I an actress. But the number of vituperative calls that CBS received as a result of our appearance together was staggering. What we didn't know was that CBS had written "AWOL" in large letters under Yolanda's head the whole time she was talking.

The thing that confounded me, Mum, was that for a while two things weighed on me alternately but equally, two things that were not equal: the deep-felt grieving for a world gone mad with slaughter, and the irritating, twittering yearning for approbation, for superficial pats on the head like the kind you got from a teacher in grade school saying, "You are a good girl, you are a good girl." What does it matter, the human need for validation in the face of all this dying? Does it all boil down to a desire to conform, to be seen as correct in our public response to war? And why, for God's sake, does the press feel the need to be an accomplice in this plot to make it appear as if every sane person in the land is lined up behind the President in support of the war?

It was great to get the news that all the Canadian Kidders marched for peace on the 26th along with hundreds of thousands of other people around the world. Do you think anyone heard us? Moose [Mike McAdam] had said we could stay at his house on the weekend of the march in Washington. Yolanda and I drove down. We got to Moose's at 3 in the morning. He knew all about my ignominy and said, "You're dead meat, Kidder." But he marched with us anyway.

The march began at around 1 P.M. and people were still walking up Pennsylvania Avenue at 4:30. That's how impressive the turnout was. The veterans were first, which is how it should be, and there were thousands and thousands of them. Then came the Military Families Support Network, and then the women I was marching with: the mothers, holding up the Madre banner. I held up the end that had a mother nestling her baby, figuring that was about as safe as you could get. Yolanda had found the one other doctor there who was refusing to serve on moral grounds.

That night I read the World War I poems of Wilfred Owen, and I thought of Granddaddy wondering for the rest of his life why he'd had to lose his youth for nothing in the trenches of Verdun, and of Daddy, bottling the horrors he'd seen in World War II way down deep behind his charm, out of sight of all of us, fighting to keep his nightmares hidden from the age of 22 onward, keeping his harrowing secret right up to the end of his life.



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My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

Was it as sad as this in World War II, Mummy? Write soon.

I love you,
Margie

# Choice

(*Continued From Front Cover*)

The original right-wing challenge to public education, vouchers for private schools, went down to a resounding defeat. The newest star on the right, choice, is both a more powerful challenger and a more interesting one. Because progressives are on the defensive, their concern with equity leads them to attack choice reflexively as inherently elitist (naturally, it has few friends among educational bureaucrats either). This is, I believe, a grave mistake. The argument over choice, unlike the one about vouchers, offers progressives an opportunity. After all, it wasn't so long ago that progressive educators were enthusiastically supporting schools of choice, usually called "alternative schools." However, those alternatives were always on the fringe, as though the vast majority were doing just fine, thanks. We now have a chance to make such alternatives the mainstream, not just for avant-garde "misfits" and "nerds" or those most "at risk."

Americans have long supported a dual school system. Whether schools are public or private, the social class of the students was and continues to be the single most significant factor in determining a school's intellectual values and how it works. The higher the student body's socioeconomic status, the meatier the curriculum, the more open-ended the discussion, the less rote and rigid the pedagogy, the more respectful the tone, the more rigorous the expectations, the greater the staff autonomy. Numerous studies have confirmed a simple fact: The primary factor in determining the quality of schools (as well as programs within schools) is not whether they are public or private but who attends them. Changing this is what education reform is all about. What we need is strategies for giving to everyone what the rich have always valued. After all, the rich have had good public schools as well as good private schools. If we use choice to undermine public education, we will increase the duality of our educational system. If we want to use it to undermine the historic duality of our schools, the kind of plan we adopt is more important than choice advocates like Moe and Chubb acknowledge.

When I first entered teaching, and when my own children began their long trek through urban public schools, I too was an unreconstructed advocate of the strictly zoned neighborhood school. I knew all about choice, a favorite tactic of racists escaping desegregation. There were even moments when I wished we could legally outlaw any selective public or private institutions, although I could readily see the risks—not to mention the political impossibility—of doing so. That's no longer the case. My change of heart has personal overtones: I've spent the past sixteen years in a public school district in East Harlem that has pioneered choice, and I have founded a network of small schools of choice in that community: the Central Park East schools. All of District 4's schools are small, largely self-governing and pedagogically innovative. They are schools with a focus, with staffs brought together around common ideas, free to shape a whole set of school parameters in accord with those ideas.

It would have been impossible to carry out this ambitious agenda without choice. Choice was the prerequisite. It was an enabling strategy for a District Superintendent, Anthony Alvarado, who wanted to get rid of the tradition of zoned, factory-style, bureaucratically controlled schools that has long been synonymous with urban public schooling and replace it with a different image of what "public" could mean. The District 4 way was deceptively simple; it required no vast blueprint, just a new mindset. Within ten years, starting in 1974, District 4 totally changed the way 15,000 mostly poor Latino and African-American youngsters got educated without ever pulling the rug out from under either parents or professionals. The words "restructuring" and "reform" were never used—this was, after all, the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Superintendent sidestepped resistance by building a parallel system of choice, until even its opponents found themselves benefiting from it.

To begin with, Alvarado initiated a few model schools open to parental choice, locating them within existing buildings where space was available. He sought schools that would look excitingly different, that would have a loyal, if small, following among families and would have strong professional leadership. Alvarado and his Alternate Schools director, Sy Fliegel, gave such schools extraordinary support in the form of greater flexibility with regard to staffing, use of resources, organization of time, forms of assessment and on-site advice and counseling. Wherever possible, they also ran interference with Central Board of Education bureaucracy. When people in the "regular" schools complained of favoritism, Alvarado and Fliegel assured them that they'd be favorites too if they had some new ideas they wanted to try. Some even accepted the challenge. Each year, more schools were added. They generally started with a few classes and the largest grew to no more than 300 students. Some stayed as small as fifty. Within half a dozen years most of the students in the middle and junior-high grades were attending alternative schools, and each district building housed several autonomous schools.

Schools were no longer equated with buildings. Where there had been twenty-two schools in twenty-two buildings, in less than ten years fifty-one schools occupied twenty buildings (along with two housed in a nearby high school). Only then did the Superintendent announce Stage Two: Henceforth no junior high would serve a specific geographic area. All fami-

*Deborah W. Meier has been working in New York City public schools for the past twenty-three years and is currently principal of Central Park East Secondary School. This article is adapted from her essay in* Independent Schools in the 1990's, *edited by Pearl R. Kane (forthcoming from Jossey-Bass).*

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# HOW COME?

*We're at war, we say, to "liberate" Kuwait from Iraqi occupation and restore its unelected ruler;*

*Yet how come the U.S. assists Israel's occupation of the Palestinians who only seek democracy?*

*We're at war, we say, to enforce Security Council resolutions;*

*Yet how come the U.S. continually helps Israel defy similar Security Council resolutions?*

*We're at war, we say, to bring about a "new world order";*

*Yet how come the U.S. uses precisely the means of yesteryear's colonial old world order?*

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lies of incoming seventh graders would have to choose. The district provided sixth-grade parents and teachers with lots of information to assist them in their choice, although probably word-of-mouth was the decisive factor (as it is in private schools). Sixteen neighborhood elementary schools remain intact, with space reserved first for those living within the designated zone, but Alvarado promised that parents were free to shop around if space existed. In addition, the district supported the creation of twenty alternative elementary schools, eight of them bilingual. As a result, the neighborhood elementary schools became both smaller and, in effect, also schools of choice. Alvarado even enticed a former independent elementary school to enter the public sector, leaving intact its parental governing board.

A majority of the new schools were fairly traditional, although more focused in terms of their themes (such as music, science or journalism) and more intimate and family-oriented due to their small size. Size also meant that regardless of the formal structure, all the participants were generally informally involved in decisions about school life. Most of the schools were designed by small groups of teachers tired of compromising what they thought were their most promising ideas. As a result there was a level of energy and esprit, a sense of co-ownership that made these schools stand out. They developed, over time, differences in pedagogy, style of leadership, forms of governance, tone and climate. A few schools (such as the three Central Park East schools) used this opening to try radically different forms of teaching and learning, testing and assessment, school/family collaboration and staff self-government. In this one small district, noted only a decade earlier as one of the worst in the city, there were by 1984 dozens of schools with considerable citywide reputations and stature, alongside dozens of others that were decidedly more humane, where kids found it hard to fall through the cracks and teachers were enthusiastic about teaching. A few were mediocre or worse; one or two had serious problems. The consensus from the streams of observers who came to see, and those who studied the data, was that the change was real and lasting. What was even more important, however, was that the stage was set for trying out more innovative educational ideas as professionals had the opportunity to be more directly involved in decision making. It was not a cost-free idea, but the added expense was small compared with many other heralded reform efforts; it was less than the cost of one additional teacher for every newly created school.

If this were the best of all possible worlds, the next ten years would have been used to launch Stage Three. The district would have studied what was and was not happening within these fifty-three small schools, examined more closely issues of equity, tracked their graduates over time, studied the families' reasons for making choices and looked for strategies to prod schools into taking on tougher challenges. The Central Board would have worked out ways to legitimize these "wildcat" schools while also encouraging other districts to follow a similar path. Under the leadership of Alvarado's successor, Carlos Medina, District 4 launched Stage Three. But it was not the best of all worlds, and the district found itself on the defensive for reasons that had nothing to do with education in the fifty-three schools. As a result, Medina's efforts to move ahead were thwarted, and new leadership hostile to choice was installed. Today, in 1991, District 4 stands once again at a crossroads, with new sympathetic leadership both within the district and at the Central Board, although badly hobbled by the threat of draconian budget cuts. That the fifty-three schools have survived the past few years in a system that not only never officially acknowledged their existence but often worked to thwart them is a tribute to the loyalty and ingenuity that choice and co-ownership together engender.

While the District 4 story suggests that choice is fully compatible with public education and an efficient vehicle for setting in motion school reform, it is foolhardy not to acknowledge that in the political climate of the 1990s choice runs the risk of leading to privatization.

However, it's not enough these days to cry out in alarm at the possible demise of public education. If public schools are seen as incapable of responding to the demand for wholesale reform, why should we expect the public to resist privatization? Maybe private schools aren't much better, but if public education has proved so inept at meeting the challenge, if it has had such a poor history of serving equity or excellence, it's easy to see the lure of privatization. Given this history, why not just let the chips fall where they may?

The question is a good one. If we want to preserve public education as the norm for most citizens then we'd better have important and positive reasons for doing so, reasons that are compelling to parents, teachers and the broader voting pub-

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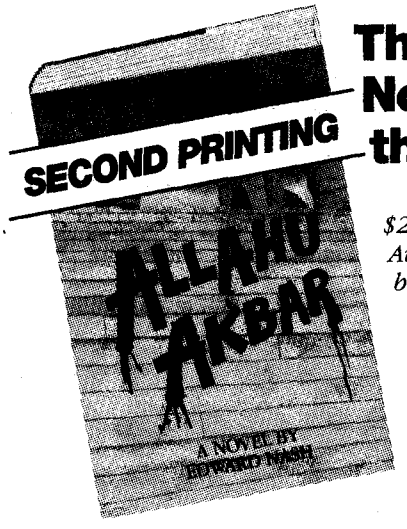


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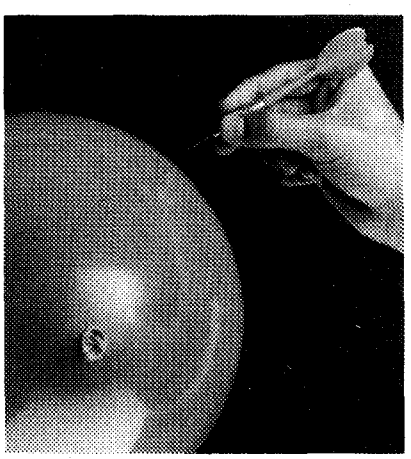

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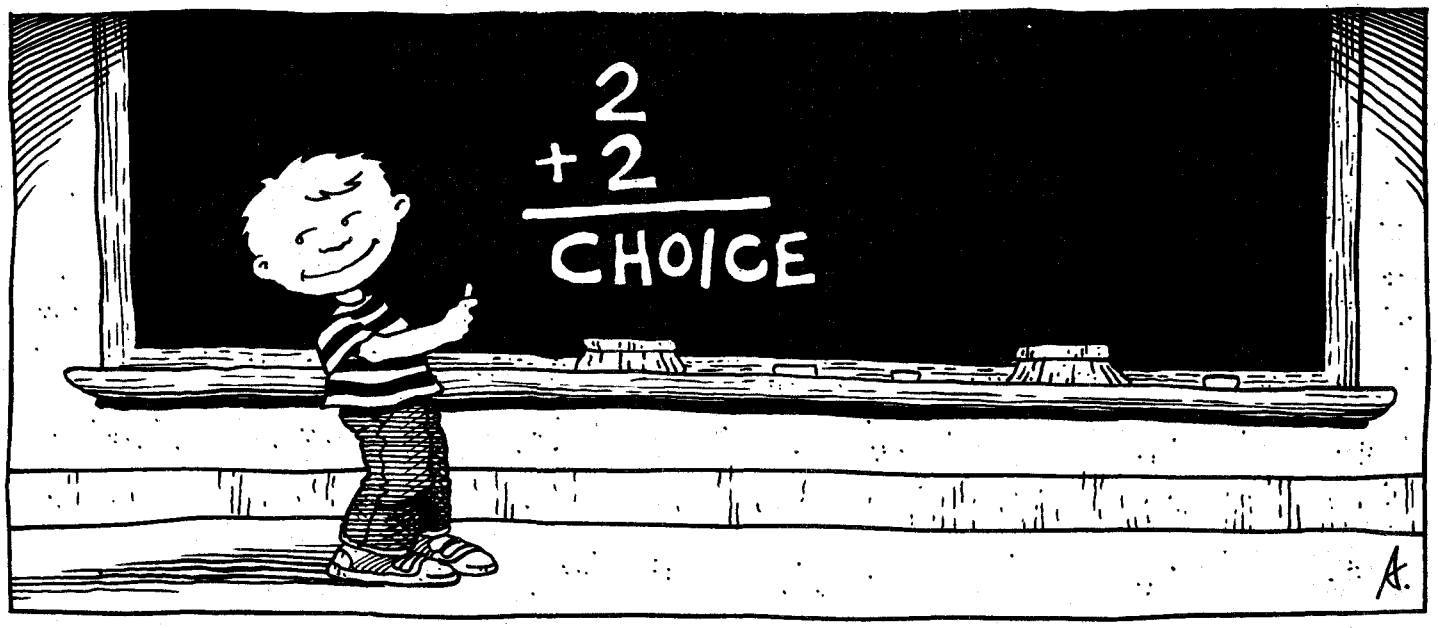
lic. To do so we must make the case that the rationale for improving education goes far beyond the problem employers face in recruiting sufficient numbers of competent and reliable workers or our chagrin at finding the United States at the bottom in test scores for math and science. At least as important is the role education plays as a tool in reviving and maintaining the fabric of our democratic institutions. While public education may be useful as an industrial policy, it is *essential* to healthy public life in a democracy. The two go together, and never has this been clearer than it is today. If we cannot make a convincing case for this, we will see our public schools dismantled in one way or another, either by a misused choice or by erosion and neglect as funds dry up for public education and private schooling becomes the norm for those who can afford to opt out. The status quo plus cosmetic changes won't save public education, at least not in our major urban areas.

The alternative to privatization is good public education, and choice is an essential tool in the effort to create such education. It is the necessary catalyst for the kind of dramatic restructuring that most agree is needed to produce a far better educated citizenry. Virtually all the major educational task forces, for example, agree that dramatic changes will require removing the stifling regulations that presently keep schools tied to outmoded practices, to doing things in lockstep. They agree that if we want change, we'll have to put up with nonconformity and some messiness. We'll have to allow those most involved (teachers, administrators, parents) to exercise greater on-site power to put their collective wisdom into practice. Once we do all this, however, school X and school Y are going to start doing things differently. How then can we ignore personal "tastes"? Besides, it's a lot easier to undertake difficult innovations successfully if teachers, parents and students are in agreement.

We can't expect the marketplace, public or private, to stimulate this kind of reform magically. Private schools as an example of the market at work aren't very inspiring when it comes to innovation. They may encourage livelier educational practice, but in general they are as convention-bound as public schools. They mostly differ in an invidious way, much like their public school sisters. There's a hierarchy among them, based mostly on how choosy the school can be about whom it accepts. The fact that the choosiest schools attract higher-status families and select only the most promising students insures their success; replication, by definition, is impossible. Their value lies in their scarcity. This kind of marketplace has led not to innovation but to imitation on a steadily watered-down basis, appealing not so much to different "tastes" but to different means and expectations. The dual system has remained alive and well in the private sector. But if the marketplace is not a magical answer, neither, experience suggests, can we expect that forced change from the top down will work. What results from such bureaucratically mandated change is anger and sabotage on the part of unwilling, unready parents and professionals as well as the manipulation of data by ambitious bureaucrats and timid administrators. The end result: a gradual return to the status quo.

To improve education for all children will require more than one simple cure-all. It requires a set of strategies. For starters, federal, state and local initiatives can stimulate districts to adopt one or another variation of the District 4 story: providing incentives to districts to break up their oversized buildings and redesign them into many small schools, easily accessible for families to choose from. Once we think small, we can even imagine locating new schools in other available public and private spaces, near workplaces as well as residences, in places where young people can interact with adults going about their daily business. While no system of rules and regulations can insure equity, public policy can assure that resources are fairly allocated. It can go further by establishing guidelines that promote appropriate social, ethnic, racial and academic diversity.

We'll also need a better quality of information if we want to promote long-range school change. We'll need a public that is not confused by misleading data or quickly discouraged by the absence of dramatically improved statistics. Who knows today what the definition of a high school dropout is or what "reading on grade level" means? We'll need to place less reliance on standardized high-stakes testing systems. Good lay

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information will encourage the kind of lively, even contentious, dialogue about the nature and purpose of education that is so badly needed. Choice offers no guaranteed solution to these concerns, but the existence of clear and coherent alternatives encourages such debate.

Similarly, greater school-based autonomy goes well with choice. School-based management itself does not trigger innovation, but it offers a much better audience for such innovation. Empowered faculties and families are better able to hear new ideas and less likely to sabotage them. Innovation no longer appears threatening. School-based management combined with the idea of small schools of choice allows both parents and teachers to embrace new ideas even if they cannot convince all their colleagues or all the school's parents. Furthermore, once we set loose those who are already eager to "restructure," it will be easier to encourage successive waves of innovators and risk takers. While R&D in education can't take place in labs separate from real life, as it can in most industries, no one wants to be a guinea pig. Creating a school different from what any of those who work in the system are familiar with, one that runs counter to the experiences of most families, is possible only if teachers, parents and students have time to agree on changes and a choice on whether or not they want to go along with them.

*By using choice judiciously, we can have the virtues of the marketplace without some of its vices.*

Since school officials, like parents, are naturally conservative and reluctant to change their habits, we don't need to sign them all up at once. What's needed first is a range of models, examples for teachers and the public to scrutinize and learn from. Credibility will require a critical mass of such schools; at this stage it is hard to know how many. But we can go only as fast and as far as those who bear the burden of change can tolerate. Putting more money into schools does not guarantee success but it can accelerate the pace of change. Of course, taking money out slows down the possibilities for change too.

In short, choice is necessary but not sufficient. There's something galling about the idea that you're stuck in a particular school that's not working for you unless you are rich enough to buy yourself out of it. Still, if it worked for most students, we'd put up with it, but it doesn't. What's not necessary is to buy into the rhetoric that too often surrounds choice: about the rigors of the marketplace, the virtues of private schooling and the inherent mediocrity of public places and public spaces. By using choice judiciously, we can have the virtues of the marketplace without some of its vices, and we can have the virtues of the best private schools without undermining public education. □

# EDITORIALS.

(*Continued From Page 257*)

gained the result of devastating Iraq's military infrastructure, making it highly unlikely that Iraq could mount a serious threat to its neighbors in the near future. The sense of achievement would be reinforced by the remarkably low level of American casualties relative to the scale of the war. By stopping now Bush would also avoid the risks of a ground campaign, including heavy casualties, growing dissent at home and in Europe, likely defections from the coalition and an almost certain hardening of Islamic hearts against all things Western for a long time to come. To go ahead with the war might truly imperil access to gulf oil and generate a tidal wave of fundamentalist militancy, sweeping away existing political arrangements throughout the region. Ironically, the American war machine might in the end achieve what the Ayatollah Khomeini and Saddam Hussein could only dream about.

On Saddam's side this cold logic of peace is equally compelling. Iraq has, in a sense, withstood the incredible air onslaught of the coalition without collapse or surrender. No Arab country has managed this much resistance throughout the entire century. Saddam's voice has been heard by the Arab masses, indeed by the whole Islamic world. But to go on with the war by remaining in Kuwait is suicidal at this stage.

Of course, cold logic is never enough. It must be reinforced and masked by some sort of political process. One can assume that the flurry of recent diplomatic activity by France, Iran, Algeria, the Soviet Union and others is intended to establish this process. Perhaps both leaders are too stiff-necked to heed even their most primitive self-interest, but citizens must act on the assumption that some possibility exists to avoid carrying this already dreadful war to its bitter end.

The easiest way to move forward is for either leader to act unilaterally. Saddam could stop the war simply by withdrawing, Bush by reverting to the sanctions-plus approach. But the mindset of the two leaders creates an almost zero prospect of that happening.

Hence we must assume that if a political process is to materialize, it must have at least the semblance of mutuality. Without doubt Iraq must quit Kuwait, while the United States must remove its forces from the gulf. Further, both leaders will have to endorse a Middle East conference on peace, security and cooperation with an open agenda and a flexible format.

I wish fervently that our best hope did not rest on cold logic. I wish that the horror of war—so manifest these past weeks—could have produced a backlash of revulsion. Or that the suffering of the peoples of Kuwait and Iraq could move the opposing leaders to back off. Or that the U.N. would summon the courage to revoke its mandate to wage unrestricted war. But such compassionate responses will not be forthcoming without a "new world order," not in the form of Bush's geopolitical fantasy but built on the foundation of human rights and shaped by democratic social forces dedicated to the vision of a warless world.

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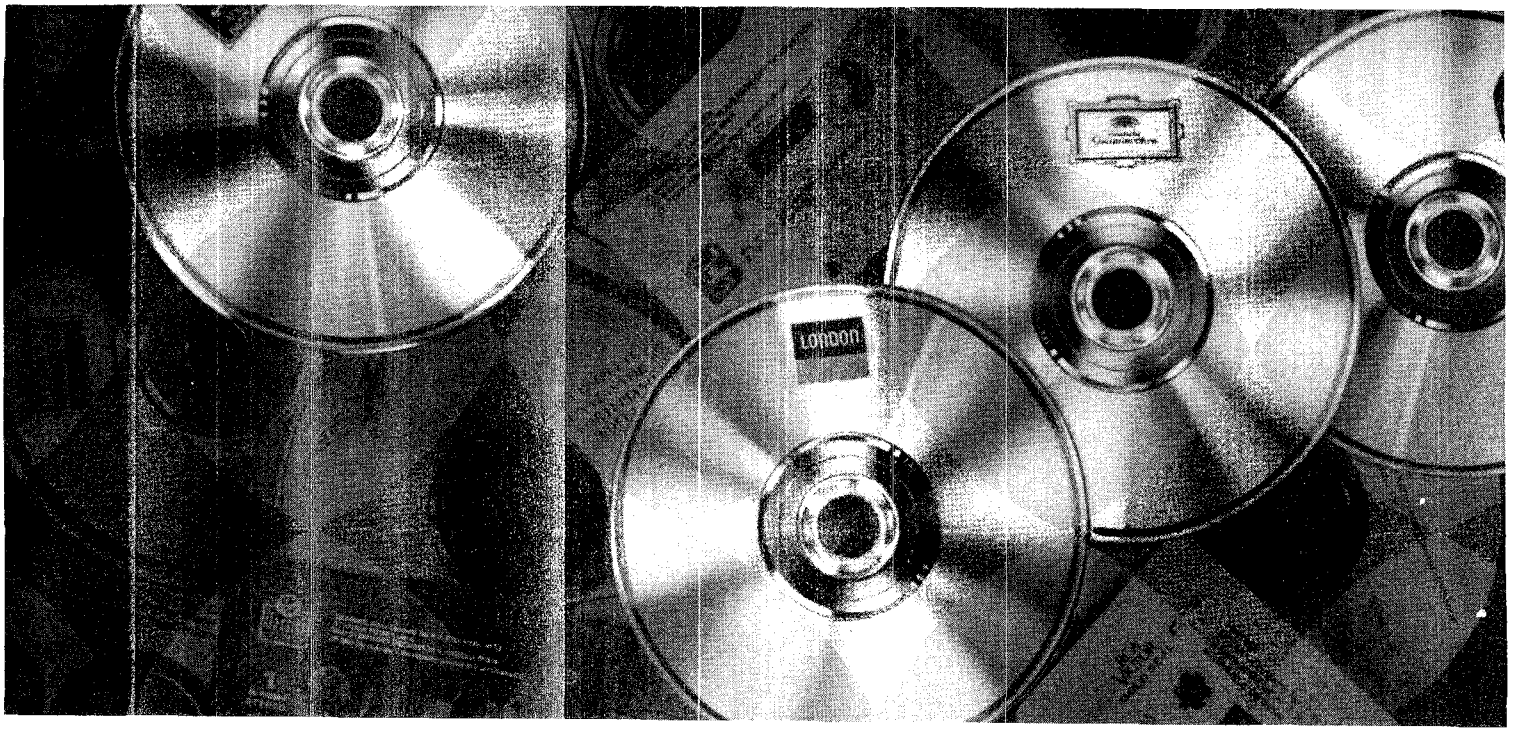


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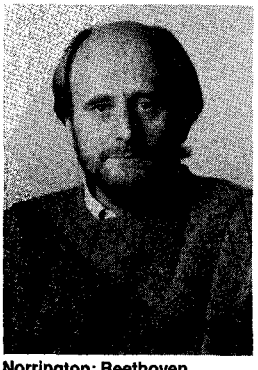

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# BOOKS & THE ARTS.

## Steele Trap

ADOLPH REED JR.

THE CONTENT OF OUR CHARACTER: A New Vision of Race in America. *By Shelby Steele. St. Martin's Press. 175 pp. $15.95.*

Let's settle one issue at the outset. This is an abominably thin, simple-minded book. *The Content of Our Character* is unburdened with facts outside a particularly limited compass of personal experience, and its analysis is innocent of social or political complexity. It builds castles of psychobabble on platitudes and banal autobiographical anecdotes.

The book warrants consideration, nevertheless, in part because it shows incontestably that the equivalent of Chance the Gardener can be anointed national race-relations expert. To that extent, it reveals the cynicism, reflexive racial stereotypes and lack of standards of intelligence (as well as the obverse—boundless tolerance for ignorant speculation) that define public discourse about black Americans. This context makes it necessary to devote considerable space to a critique of a book unworthy of review on its merits. Otherwise one risks being dismissed as a member of the racial thought police. Not this time. And yes, I do have an ax to grind. I am outraged at having to confront once again, as if they were innovations, arguments that amount to claims that black Americans are a generically defective human subspecies. It often appears that all that has changed in a century of this discussion is that culture has replaced biology as the favored source of Afro-Americans' inferiority, and forthcoming "research" from the likes of Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein promises to erase even that change.

My bluntness may seem extreme, but enough is enough. For the third time in a decade a black public figure has risen to celebrity by announcing that black Americans must straighten themselves out instead of making demands on the state for equity as citizens. Steele writes gracefully; he makes self-improvement bromides seem almost like incisive social commentary. However, beneath layers of artfully crafted drivel about group psychology and homely clichés worthy of a high school coach (e.g., his call for "commitment to effort—the catalyst of opportunity"), that all-too-familiar announcement is the central substance of this collection of his essays. His rise is only the newest act in the perverse carnival: A black person seizes the public stage by ratifying the social prejudices of the wealthy and powerful, all the while complaining of censure and persecution and receiving praise for courageously taking an unpopular stand. Steele's vacuity only indicates how little quality matters in rewarding the performance. Making proper sense of him and his silly book, therefore, requires relating him to the two earlier incarnations of this obscene spectacle.

*Steele's rise is only the newest act in the perverse carnival: A black person seizes the public stage by ratifying the prejudices of the rich and powerful.*

First, at the dawn of the Reagan era, there was Thomas Sowell. Yes, he is conservative, we were told, but he is calling for fresh approaches, raising questions others don't dare to, breaking with a stale orthodoxy. He attacked an undeniably complacent and hardly visionary civil rights establishment and argued—curiously harmonizing with Reagan—that blacks had been hurt by racial elites' dependence on government. Sowell's star faded because he eventually certified himself as an ultraright crank of the H.L. Hunt or Jesse Helms variety (as late as 1987 he derided concern about the homeless as sanctifying "bums" who "refuse to work").

Then, in Reagan's second term, came Glenn Loury, like Sowell an economist and this time with the Harvard imprimatur. Initially less combative than Sowell, Loury argued for open-mindedness vis-à-vis the Reaganite social policy agenda. He exhorted black elites to rise above their self-serving commitment to "social engineering," which, he maintained, not only had failed; it had also blocked confronting deeper social pathologies in black America that lie beyond the reach of—and even are exacerbated by—government intervention. He flattered petit-bourgeois black sensibilities by declaring a special middle-class responsibility for cleaning up the race, thus softening the uncomfortable rhetorical tension between explicitly right-wing and nationalist versions of self-help ideology.

Loury denounced affirmative action simultaneously for fueling self-doubt and stifling individual initiative with presumptions of entitlement. He railed against predatory, irresponsible black males who must be coerced into proper behavior. Like Sowell and others, he drew on the authority of confessional narrative, admitting that he had impregnated a girl in adolescence and that his father had beaten him into taking responsibility for his actions and getting his life in order. He presented this saga as evidence for a claim that drug abuse and street crime derive principally from absence of strong fathers. Go figure.

Loury self-destructed on his way to a 1987 sub-Cabinet level appointment in William Bennett's Education Department. He was discovered both to have defaulted on student loans and—despite the famous patriarchal lesson—to have fathered and been jailed for nonsupport of a second child out of wedlock. Having survived those revelations, he was arrested first for beating and stomping the young mistress he had been keeping and then, following a police car chase prompted by prostitutes in his company, for possession of cocaine and a homemade crack pipe.

Enter Shelby Steele, from the English department at San Jose State University, to fill the breach. In a series of essays beginning in 1988 in *Commentary*, *Harper's*, *The American Scholar*, *The New York Times Magazine* and *Dissent*, Steele unveiled his distinctive, California suburban spin on the argument that black Americans have themselves most of all to blame for their problems and should therefore shut up. The thread connecting those essays—which form the core of *The Content of Our Character*—is a claim that Afro-Americans suffer main-

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ly from a collective self-image that prefers victimization to success and imposes a suffocating racial conformity that ostracizes the venturesome.

The essays catapulted Steele from obscurity even within academic life into high visibility in the infotainment world. He has produced and narrated a PBS special on race relations and has had numerous opportunities to air his fresh voice on *Nightline*, *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* and other news-chat programs. He even has been the subject of puff pieces in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, where he was featured on the front page of the "Style" section.

Already I can imagine protests that it is unfair to link Steele to Sowell and Loury. Steele himself noted in *The Washington Post* that he supported Jesse Jackson in 1988 and had never voted for a Republican; "All I do now," he lamented, "is spend my energy saying I'm not a conservative." He has declared, "I do not think of myself as either [a neoconservative or a right-winger]." And, after all, publishing in *Dissent* suggests that he has some identification with the left. Jim Sleeper, who cites Steele in lieu of evidence for broad-gauge assertions about black Americans in *The Closest of Strangers*, his recent book on racial politics in New York (see Haywood Burns's December 3 review in *The Nation*), has proposed that he is really apolitical or naïve about politics. So am I taking a cheap shot, using what Steele has called, in rejecting a similar characterization in *Dissent*, the "tactics of racial politics" to condemn him unjustly for *Nation* readers as an ideological enemy?

Not a chance. And Steele's defense indicates the fatuousness of the mind that spawned it. How Shelby Steele chooses to "think of" himself is of no consequence. What is significant is that, like Sowell and Loury, he attributes manifest racial inequality principally to defects among Afro-Americans and maintains that it is somehow illegitimate for black citizens to view government action and public policy as vehicles for egalitarian redress. Moreover, he disparages "social engineering," attacks the use of differential effects as evidence of discriminatory practice and repeatedly construes blacks' agendas as demands for "entitlements" that he then juxtaposes with "fairness" or white males' "constitutional rights." Perhaps his use of the Reaganite right's rhetorical frame is naïve, but his explicit endorsement of Reagan's views undermines that interpretation. Steele declares:

> I believe there was much that Reagan had to offer blacks. His emphasis on traditional American values—individual initiative, self-sufficiency, strong families—offered what I think is the most enduring solution to the demoralization and poverty that continue to widen the gap between blacks and whites in America. Even his de-emphasis of race [!] was reasonable in a society where race only divides.

He counsels political quietism with a peremptory dismissiveness toward collective action:

> My deepest feeling is that, in a society of increasingly limited resources, there will never be enough programs to meet the need. What I really believe is that we black Americans will never be saved or even assisted terribly much by others . . . and never find that symmetrical, historical justice that we cannot help but long for. These things will never happen. . . . There will be no end to despair and no lasting solution to any of our problems until we rely on individual effort within the American mainstream—rather than collective action against the mainstream—as our means of advancement.

No matter what else one might say about this ensemble of views, they certainly betray a rightist outlook. Indeed, the comparison is more likely unfair to Sowell and Loury. If only because of training as social scientists, they demonstrate some intellectual sophistication, tying their arguments to complex interpretations of historical, socioeconomic and political facts. For all their limitations, Sowell and Loury at least wave at evidence outside their expressed beliefs.

*The Content of Our Character* is not so much a collection of essays as nine versions of a single essay. Each is driven by a first-person narrative structure that elides the distinction between singular and plural. Each employs an incident in Steele's life synecdochically—suburban cocktail-party conversations, reminiscences of youthful encounters, speculation about the psyches of random strangers in supermarkets—to make the same point: Black Americans' own "unconscious replaying of our oppression is now the greatest barrier to our full equality."

One essay, for example, proceeds from recollection of a graduate school colleague who aspired only to settling into a not-very-demanding academic job. In Steele's view, that modest aspiration, which "Henry" apparently realized, reflects a "hidden racial anxiety" that is

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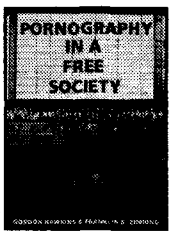


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the primary source of black Americans' "ineffectiveness in taking better advantage of our greater opportunity" since the 1960s. With a boost from trite self-examination, Steele leaps from a passing conversation with an acquaintance to mass racial psychoanalysis. "My own compulsion to understand him," our intrepid analyst confides, "informs me that I must have seen many elements of myself in him," and he drags us back to his sixth-grade classroom "to look at how the Henry was born in me." He rakes over a childhood hurt to find the germ of an "anti-self . . . an internal antagonist and saboteur that embraces the world's negative view of us." He spins a web of idiotic self-awareness patter ("a disbelieving part of the self is brought to life and forever joined to the believing self") to conclude that the legacy of racial oppression and social pathology gives blacks a particularly powerful anti-self (or is it anti-selves?) and thus low self-esteem. The result is fear of success and limited aspiration. That explains why "by many socioeconomic measures we are further behind whites today than before the great victories of the civil rights movement."

Putting aside the possibility that Henry's actual motivations and objectives may have been more complex than could be deduced from a remark to a casual associate, who is Steele to decide that the man was selling himself short? And what would our Guardian of Racial Accomplishment have had him do instead? (I might note that Steele has not exactly dazzled in his own career. Inquiries to colleagues around the country have yielded no one—even among those who sympathize with his views—in his area of specialization, Afro-American literature, who had heard of him as a scholar or otherwise before he became a public racial voice.) Besides, Henry's limited aspirations provide him a stable middle-class life; to that extent he fails to exemplify the circumstance Steele adduces him to explain. As an academic functionary, Henry has done his part to close the racial income gap. And no doubt his success, like that of all minority and female academics in this era, including Shelby Steele (how many faculty slots did San Jose State devote to Afro-American literature before 1970?), has been aided by the existence of affirmative action.

Steele has no trouble generalizing from a single individual—even one so atypical as a doctoral student at the University of Utah—to the entire Afro-American population because he begins with essentialist premises of the sort that drive racialist thinking. He reproduces the hoary notion that common racial identification confers distinctive mental states and orientations, racial mentalities or temperaments. He extrapolates from a discussion with a black U.C.L.A. student to declaim on the corrosive racial anxiety "of all blacks on any campus." Even the book's title shouts the premise: a single content, a single character. Nor is his essentialism restricted to blacks; he dots his plaint with unfavorable comparisons of black Americans to other groups with allegedly healthier essences.

*Steele remains wedded to the simplistic polarity of black nationalism; he has merely switched sides.*

Steele's racial essentialism is doubly ironic. First, it belies all his soundbite existentialism, his angst about racial conformity and beleaguered black individuality. One cannot slide blithely back and forth between "I" and "we," obliterating all distinction between self and race, *and* at the same time complain that one's uniqueness as an individual has been suppressed. Second, it exposes the god-that-failed aspect of his vision. Steele confesses a youthful flirtation with black nationalism. Although he has long since repudiated its specific dogmas, he remains wedded to its simplistic polarity; he merely switched sides. The existence of distinctive racial psychologies is a pivotal doctrine of late-60s cultural nationalism, as is the presumption that improving black Americans' lives must rest on changing their putative values. His concluding charge—"We need a collective identity that, etc., etc."—uncannily evokes the structure and meter of Kawaida nationalists' recitations of the Seven Principles of the Nguzu Saba. Similarly, his obsession with personal transcendence of a pathological culture of oppression is consistent with the nationalist project of racial self-purification. Steele came to his nationalist fling with a compulsion to measure himself against a composite of offensive stereotypes that his family dubbed "Sam"; he left with that same compulsion, which he now proposes as social theory.

Steele's focus on identity depoliticizes strategic discourse, as cultural nationalism does, and not just because it substitutes therapy for action. For all his blather about blacks' self-defeating reluctance to join a vague "mainstream," Steele reproduces the cult-nat view that Afro-Americans are not genuine members of the American polity. He invariably characterizes black citizens' relation to the institutions and processes of public authority in the third person, never in the first. That is why he sees pursuit of group interests through political action as a demeaning practice in which blacks appeal to "them"—the government, whites, America, his "mainstream"—to do something for "us." That view, which unites Ron Karenga and Ronald Reagan, contrasts sharply with the principle that blacks are full participants in American civic life and have equal claims with others—as both individuals and as a group—on the shaping of the public norms and practices that define the political community. Steele's fretting that black Americans must show that they accept "mainstream" American values denies their role in forming those values; to that extent he assigns Afro-Americans a passive, truly second-class citizenship.

Speculation about public figures' psychological motivations is a suspect, trivializing enterprise. It is usually an evasive alternative to critique. Steele, though, not only invites it; he virtually demands it. His feelings and primal impressions are his main evidence, and he wears his psychic tensions on his sleeve. In any event, we have much more information about him than he does about any of those whose psyches he presumes to inventory. And that information points powerfully in one direction: that Steele's fixation on black racial anxiety is (like Loury's concern with black male pathology) largely Dostoyevskyan. It is the expression of an inner, very personal torment that he assuages by objectifying it as a racial trait, projected onto and attacked in others. He finds racial anxiety and inadequacy pandemic among blacks—even in the muteness of total strangers—because, through reifying his own fears in the image of the feckless "Sam," he has embodied them in an explicitly racialized form. The public markers of blackness merge with the "graphic images of everything [he] should not be." He assures us, for instance, that he

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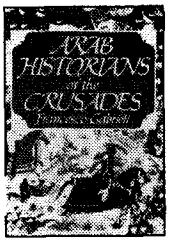


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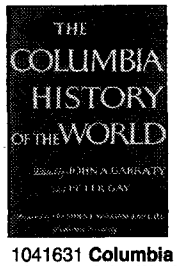


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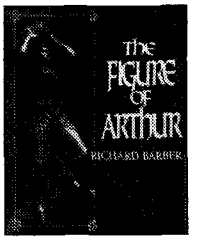


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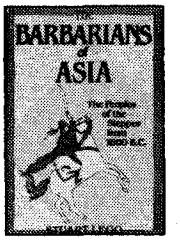


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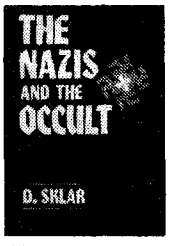


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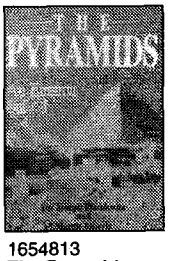


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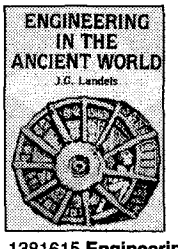


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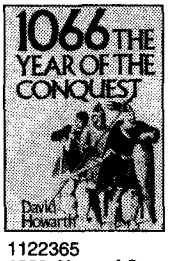


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has seen the effects of self-defeating attitudes "in my own life and in the lives of *virtually every black person I've known*." [Emphasis added.]

Characterizing this dynamic as racial self-hatred is too neat, although Steele seems as nearly pure an instance as can exist this side of psychosis. Genuine racial self-hatred, however, requires a truly psychotic denial of an element of the sufferer's reality. Shelby Steele is not crazy; he's just a fool.

He expresses a perspective familiar among those threatened by the proximity of supposed inferiors, though in his case the proximity is ideological, not physical. Marginally lower-middle-class whites objectify encroaching nonwhites as representations of the constant peril of downward mobility; the latter become the image of generic threat to an intrinsically precarious life style. Upwardly mobile, ghettoized nonwhites frequently stereotype their neighbors as negative role models, the embodiment of an energizing fear of failure. This objectification, I suspect, grounds a strain of black conservatism: "I don't want to end up like them" becomes "I'm not like them" becomes "Why can't they do what I've done?" becomes "They're poor because they lack initiative."

Steele does not reject racial identification absolutely; teaching his children pride in their black "heritage" is among the clichés he affirms. He objects rightly, therefore, to charges that he denies or despises blackness in principle. His views on this topic are in fact his clearest and most substantive. He finds black identity oppressive because he believes its prevailing mode glosses over class and status distinctions and maintains that the "poor black is the true black." He wants a new racial identity "that does not imply that the least among us are the most black."

In his complaint Steele repeats a black petit-bourgeois lament that dates at least from the consolidation of Jim Crow at the end of the nineteenth century. Race spokespersons commonly have included in their briefs against segregation (or discrimination in other forms) an objection that its purely racial character fails to differentiate among blacks and lumps the respectable, cultivated and genteel in with the rabble. Steele personalizes this frustration in a particularly bitter and victim-blaming way. Reflecting—in the *San Francisco Examiner*'s *Image* magazine—on an encounter with a young black man who dared to be genial in public despite being unemployed, Steele discloses the meanspirited, contemptuous foundation of his allegedly "New Vision of Race in America." Dropping his hot-tub philosophical detachment, he snarls: "The stereotype of the lazy black SOB is common, and the fear is profound that I'll be judged by that stereotype. They will judge our race by him—and they'll overlook me, quietly sitting on that bus grading those papers." Would that he had been overlooked.

***To Steele, race figures into social life only in interpersonal dynamics, not as a domain of social stratification.***

If Steele were not such a willing participant in his celebrity, he might elicit pathos as yet another black American stigmatist, crippled by and brandishing the wounds of racial stratification—Bigger Thomas's alter ego. The forces that torment him are indeed pitiably beyond his ken. In fact, cocktail-party chitchat figures so prominently in his reckoning because that is the level his *Cliffs Notes* intellect naturally seeks. He not only retails homilies and catch phrases without qualification, as if their meanings were self-evident; he asserts them as novel, definitive responses to major social issues and political debates. In evincing "merit" and "constitutional rights" as trumps in his attack on affirmative action, he seems not to have a clue that the controversy centers precisely on how much the prevailing constructions of merit include being white and male or on how competing claims can be adjudicated and various principals' rights realized in practice.

Steele occasionally displays an ignorance so extreme and solipsistic that his pronouncements appear to be those of a feral child. He has a cordial exchange with a white female employee at a Southern airport and then decides that his initial skittishness about her accent reflected black Americans' "enemy-memory," their tendency to dwell on "past victimization." Her politeness shows the irrationality of black fears of racial hostility in the New South. Where Ronald Reagan wooed whites by opening his 1980 campaign with praises for states' rights in Philadelphia, Mississippi (known only, need I recall, for the murder of civil rights workers); where George Bush focused on his Willie Horton obscenity; where ex-Klansman and neo-Nazi David Duke just had won a Louisiana state legislative seat and was well on the way to garnering 61 percent of the white vote for the U.S. Senate; where Guy Hunt and Jesse Helms were cranking up successful, scurrilously racist campaigns, Steele obliviously searches for the barometer of the region's racial politics in a fleeting, commercial micro-interaction.

In his purview race figures into social life only in interpersonal dynamics, not as a domain of durable social stratification. He discusses race relations exclusively in terms of individual behavior—"insensitivity," "race fatigue," "integration shock," racial insults, etc.—to the point of reifying groups as individual actors. This is how he comes to the preposterous charge that blacks have alienated whites through abusive, irresponsible use of the tremendous "moral power" acquired since the 1960s. He sees the horizon of power only in the immediacy of interpersonal transaction, without regard to the larger contexts of hierarchy that constrain the terms and stakes of any interaction.

His rare appeals to the world beyond personal experience are breathtakingly uninformed. In his rendition of the nostalgia masquerading as analysis that is now standard among a black middle-class cohort slouching ever more deeply into middle age, he raises doubt that he has sense enough to know where to pick up his paycheck. When he was an undergraduate at Coe College, the eighteen blacks on campus in his first year all graduated; at San Jose State, he claims, the current dropout rate for black students is 72 percent. Steele proffers these factoids as evidence that his generation, and mine, I might add, allegedly prospered because we had something to prove. He charges that the current generation does poorly—despite much greater opportunity and support—because blacks have succumbed to entitlement ideology and do not confront their inevitable racial anxiety. He seems never to consider the important differences between a tiny, selective liberal arts college and a large, nonselective state university—e.g., intimate classes, intensive contact with faculty, extensive monitoring of academic and emotional well-being, and close-knit and academically focused peer culture

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versus large, anonymous classes, atomized institutional life and diffuse student culture. Similarly, in adducing the Constitution in defense of white men against "preferential treatment programs," he refers to *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the landmark 1896 Supreme Court case that established the separate-but-equal doctrine—and misspells *both* names.

It is not surprising that Tory pundits like George Will drool over Steele. He shares their racial program, and for such cynical ideologues that is all that is important. He and his ideas are also mediagenic. By fusing it with pop psychology, Steele gives racial self-help rhetoric a comforting, all-American frame—inequality as a form of codependency. His analysis is tailor-made for Oprah, Sally Jessy and Phil.

But others besides reactionary propagandists and mass media publicists collude in legitimizing Steele's persona. Respectable scholars and journalists, even while establishing their distance, receive his commentary with an unwarranted seriousness; act as if he actually makes credible arguments or has something new, different or challenging to say; commend him for his vaunted courage. From one angle that is the most disturbing, and most revealing, aspect of the entire spectacle. Thus Juan Williams, though noting *The Content of Our Character*'s inadequacies in *The New Republic*, lauds Steele's "powerful message." In *The Washington Post* William Julius Wilson praises Steele's "attempt to raise issues we ought to be discussing" (in addition to appreciating his "fresh voice that so effectively challenges conventional wisdom" and admiring his now famous courage). Even Cornel West notes his "valuable insights" in a *New York Times* puff piece. Those who are more stridently critical, e.g., Roger Wilkins, have been reduced to sputtering rage, in part, certainly, because Steele is so obscenely wrongheaded, but in part also because he has co-opted their critical language. All they can find to say is that he underestimates the power of racism.

Black petit-bourgeois response to Steele generally has been moderated by a measure of common understanding. Despite the hoopla, the substantive components of his bold "new vision" are not that different—excepting his opposition to affirmative action, which he blames even for the existence of the corporate "glass ceiling"—from agendas long articulated by the National Urban League, the N.A.A.C.P., Operation PUSH and other establishment black organizations. He joins them all in fretting over the pathological black underclass, intoning the dominant, spurious litany of "epidemic of black teen pregnancies, the weakened black family," etc. His calls for self-reliance, moral rehabilitation, business development and personal achievement all could have been drawn from the rhetoric of any race advocacy organization, public official or freelance race spokesperson.

In addition, Steele's racial message fits a line of reasoning that has been developing currency among liberal-left whites. This orientation has harder or softer varieties, but its least common denominator is that progressive political interests have suffered largely because of their conspicuous association with black Americans. Some earnestly repeat Kevin Phillips's realignment thesis and chastise limousine liberals and trendy radicals for alienating lunch-pail Democrats on behalf of insatiable blacks and shrill feminists, thus giving a new twist to the charge of forgetting the working class. A cultural modification emphasizes the way liberals have supposedly run roughshod over the sensibilities of white ethnic enclaves and their traditional values, and failed to respect their quite reasonable fears that black and Latino demands for equal access to housing, employment and education jeopardize their way of life. A more oblique variant—legitimized by William Julius Wilson's stamp of racial approval—relies on a technocratic *mea culpa* that repents having allowed the myopic black militants of the 1960s to undermine popular support for social welfare policy by racializing it. This confiteor typically—as in a recent incantation by Theda Skocpol in *The American Prospect*—traces the wrong turn to Johnson's antipoverty skirmish and conveniently conflates into a single category programs that were racially targeted, income targeted and only "popularly identified with poor blacks," thereby skirting the ticklish problem that any genuine and comprehensive redistribution initiative—no matter what it is called—will benefit minorities disproportionately and therefore be vulnerable to racist demagogy. (The proposition that "black militants" had the power to dictate federal program priorities should surprise anyone who was around at the time.) All variants of this line of reasoning, moreover, presume majoritarianism as a definitive value. Among technocratic types this bias is presented as tough-


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minded pragmatism; those who sanitize popular racism add a communitarian flourish. All seek to circumvent the thorny issue of racial stratification in contemporary life by dissolving it out of political debate.

Steele drops phrases that symbolize right thinking in this mindset. He endorses "deracinated social policies," as do Wilson, Skocpol and others who seek the ears of policy-making elites. Like Jim Sleeper and others who urge sympathetic understanding for apparent racial revanchism, he ties racial justice to a crude majoritarian calculus and attacks black advocates for not restricting their strategic conceptions of equity to what "most Americans" would accept. (Should we then put the Bill of Rights and Reconstruction Amendments up to plebiscite?) He also seems refreshing in criticizing black defensiveness and its role in producing "racial fatigue." So what if he gives no hint of pertinent knowledge or rigorous thinking and bases himself on gross and uniformly deprecating generalizations about Afro-Americans that he openly acknowledges as products of his own tortured fantasies? He at least agrees that a focus on race is divisive. For all too many whites—across the ideological spectrum—that alone is sufficient to authenticate a black "voice," even one who simultaneously claims authority based on personal insight and boasts of having virtually no contact with other blacks in his daily life. (In *Emerge*, Steele actually cites his race and family background—i.e., his parents' alleged civil rights activism—as the basis of his authority to pontificate on racial matters. Not only does that justification underscore his racial essentialism; it also reflects the lazy and demeaning view that expertise regarding Afro-American life requires no particular effort or study. After all, he has lived within the Earth's gravity all his life; does that make him a physicist?)

Yes, some of Steele's charges resonate with familiar experience. Some blacks certainly do attempt to use race to slide through academic or professional life—just as some whites attempt to use pleasing personalities, looks, family connections, fraternity ties, athletic boosterism or prep school manner. (And it is also the case that condescending white faculty regularly refuse to challenge black students and colleagues.) In black petit-bourgeois circles a disposition toward knee-jerk racial defensiveness and celebration is hegemonic, and it often runs to irrational, self-defeating extremes. Black elites routinely act opportunistically and articulate a self-serving, class-skewed agenda that presumes a racial trickle-down—a focus on set-aside contracts, upper status affirmative action and "role model" rhetoric—claiming that direct benefits to the middle class indirectly benefit the poor. Corrupt or derelict black officials too often try to escape the consequences of their failures or misdeeds through appeals to racial patriotism and claims of persecution. Their behavior unquestionably mocks democratic sensibilities, pornographically caricatures a legacy of struggle and pimps the hopes and aspirations of their constituents; it is not, however, a peculiarly black trait. (Does the name Oliver North ring a bell?)

*Steele is a hollow, smooth-edged, neatly packaged fabrication, at best a Disney World facsimile.*

Shelby Steele, however, has nothing useful to say about any of these phenomena. He quite simply does not know anything about the dynamics in which they are embedded; worse, he is too stupid to recognize that he needs to know. (He even thinks that passing a law automatically corrects injustice.) He may be disingenuous, and he definitely is irresponsible in deflecting criticism (as in *The Washington Post*) with the sigh that he finds politics boring, all the while actively participating in the new-racial-voice carnival. And the point is not that he should be silenced. The notion of black censorship or "excommunicative sanction," which Steele evokes, following Loury, Sowell and other black rightists, is, like the courage required to break ranks, a ridiculous fiction. From what institutions can one be excommunicated? How is censorship enforced? Of course there are black interests that would want to enforce conformity, but they have no way to do so. Challenging black elite orthodoxy may be commendable, but it hardly requires great courage or material sacrifice.

There is a final irony about Steele. He frequently is compared—and has compared himself—to Ralph Ellison, presumably because of his lip service to black individuality. But Steele is a hollow, smooth-edged, neatly packaged fabrication, at best a Disney World facsimile. Ellison warrants attention as a complicated thinker who demands recognition of, and may even romanticize, variety and autonomy as facts of black American existence. He insists on assuming blacks' fundamental and integral Americanness and full claim on membership in American life. Despite his middlebrow puffery, Steele sees black Americans as a monolith, and an unattractive one at that. He treats Afro-Americans only as embodiments of one or another putative racial characteristic. Quite the opposite of Ellison, he contends that blacks must prove themselves worthy of an Americanness that remains alien to them. (Steele actually brings Booker T. Washington most of all to mind. His allegorical use of the trivia of his life; his counsel against political action; his self-help, cast-down-your-buckets message; and the cadence of his race-effacing claims of general black unpreparedness all replicate Washington, to whom he relates as farce to tragedy.) The Ellison comparison is ironic in a more dramatic way in that it reveals precisely why Steele's celebrity is itself a racist outrage. Nearly forty years ago Ellison identified the essential problem:

> Many of those who write of Negro life today seem to assume that as long as their hearts are in the right place they can be as arbitrary as they wish in their formulations. Others seem to feel that they can air with impunity their most private Freudian fantasies as long as they are given the slightest camouflage of intellectuality and projected as "Negro. . . ." They write as though Negro life exists only in light of their belated regard, and they publish interpretations of Negro experience which would not hold true for their own or for any other form of human life.

Not only does this seem designed as a criticism of Steele; it more significantly underscores the disgusting racial presumptions of those who would accord his foolishness any respectability. Is this too harsh a judgment? Am I being hypersensitive and uncharitable? Witness Steele:

> Our culture was formed in oppression rather than in freedom, which means we are somewhat inexperienced in the full use of freedom, in seeing possibilities and developing them. . . . Oppression conditions people *away* from all the values and attitudes one needs in freedom—individual initiative, self-interested hard work, individual responsibility, delayed gratification. . . .

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> These values . . . were muted and destabilized by the negative conditioning of [our] oppression. . . . [We lack] the skills and attitudes that are required to thrive in freedom.

Now, for "our" and "we" substitute Jews, Italians or any other white ethnic group. How would you characterize a "voice" making such a claim? How seriously would reasonable people attend to it? What accounts for the difference? □

# ART.

## ARTHUR C. DANTO

### Max Neuhaus: Sound Works

Considering the number of Americans who view the New Year's Eve ritual of merrymakers awaiting the ball's descent at Times Square, the archipelago of nondescript pedestrian islands created by the intersection of Broadway and Seventh Avenue just north of the One Times Square tower must count among the most familiar landmarks of Manhattan. They are, for the most part, empty on New Year's Eve, as police barriers keep the crowds massed along the sidewalks; but they are largely as unoccupied as desert islands anyway, and serve mainly as pausing places for harried New Yorkers bent upon traversing the difficult intersections on the urgent missions that take them east and west. The northernmost island has a certain identity because of the TKTS pavilion, where people queue up seeking discount tickets to Broadway shows; and the southernmost island is home to an armed forces recruiting station, long a landmark of the area. The rest have some hopeful trees in wooden planters, placed there "for the beautification of Times Square," according to bronze plaques set flush with the pavement in 1964 by the Broadway Association and the City of New York. The wedge-shaped islands are in any case sufficiently inhospitable that these efforts at aesthetic redemption are virtually invisible, unless one is paying particular attention to the sparse inventory of light poles, traffic signs, subway grates and the trees. It is altogether appropriate, in consequence, that the archipelago's most singular monument should be a work of art whose substance guarantees its invisibility, inasmuch as it is made of sound.

Once one knows this artwork exists, it is impossible, looking down upon the islands as one sees the New Year in, not to visualize it as a perfectly transparent prism of sound rising up an indeterminate height from its base, defined by the wedge-shaped grate at the north edge of the island between 45th and 46th Streets and, like Ariel on Prospero's island, "invisible/ to every eyeball." Indeed, knowing it is there, one can imagine it contributing to the midnight cacophony of hoots and toots its own vertical, unwavering sound. Still, it remains discrete and does not register upon the ear unless one walks through it—and even then one can easily fail to register it. Now and again, though, someone passing through it at some less celebratory moment of the year may wonder (if it evokes a memory of Ferdinand's words in *The Tempest*, "Where should this music be? I' th'air or th'/ earth?") what the noise is all about. A kind of high-pitched, unrelenting drone, it is a sound that belongs to art by contrast to the honks of passing taxis, the screech of trains underground, the mingled shouts and mutters of the passing millions. But it somehow also goes with these sounds because of its tough and uningratiating character. It would be ill suited to the context were one who walked across the grate to hear what Caliban described as "sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not." It does not emanate from, as Stephano put it, "a brave kingdom . . . where I shall have my music for nothing"; this island is no tarrying place, and the sound is not intended to be listened to, merely heard. It really is more like the "groans [that]/ Did make wolves howl and penetrate the breasts/ Of angry bears," which were emitted by poor Ariel when he was enclosed in a pine tree—perhaps similar to those in the nearby wooden planters—by the witch Sycorax, and left there until liberated by Prospero a dozen years later. This howl has been here, filling the shaft that its precisely defined space creates, since 1977. Its title, appropriately, is *Times Square*, and as a work of public art it is exemplary in excluding no other uses to which its island might be put, and in being, through its nature, immune to desecration by graffiti.

*Times Square* is by Max Neuhaus, at one point in his career a very advanced musician, a virtuoso percussionist, in fact, who gave his final recital at Carnegie Hall in 1965 and who made his final recording for Columbia Records in the fateful year 1968. For reasons no doubt personal and conceptual, but also,


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given the spirit of those years, for reasons of what one might call political aesthetics, Neuhaus reconceived himself as a kind of visual artist who happens to use sounds rather than colors, but for whom shape is as central as it is for sculpture. As part of the general critique of institutions that swept popular consciousness in those years, it struck Neuhaus that the contrived production of sound was too important to be restricted to the artificial circumstances of the concert hall, while at the same time he was certain that the commonplace washes of music that we wade through in lobbies and elevators—what he terms "decorating with sound"—belong to a practice too finally shallow to function in the way that art is supposed to in the exaltation of the human spirit. Given his musical gifts, he could, like the harpist Daphne Hellman, who gives concerts from time to time on subway platforms, set up his drums and bells on street corners and gather a crowd. But this would simply be to make the atmosphere of the concert hall portable: He would in effect generate a bubble of aesthetic space around himself, and passers-by would form themselves into an audience, which would listen, applaud and look for a tambourine in which to drop a coin. This would not constitute a true aesthetic transformation of the environment, any more than the bubbles of air that astronauts wear on moonwalks transform the Moon's atmosphere.

What Neuhaus aspired to was the enhancement of ordinary life through sound—*ordinary* life, as it courses along, and with whose aural surfaces he could *interact* rather than whose flow he might *interrupt*, as with music. The concert hall, like the museum, is a special precinct, with rules and conventions that define the conduct of those who enter it, and whose walls, so to speak, are like parentheses that bracket the experiences had within, and segregate these experiences from the flow of life. An analogy can be made with churches. Someone might decide to "bring religion to the streets" by setting up a pulpit and declaiming the Gospel on busy corners. But this, in effect, would be a portable tabernacle, a bubble of sacral space encapsulated in midtown life, which flows unheedingly around it, save for those attracted as a momentary congregation. Someone whose religious mission corresponded to Neuhaus's artistic one would be concerned, rather, with what Feuerbach powerfully describes as "sacramental celebrations of earthly truth." Neuhaus's work, then, involves what one might think of as minimal displacements of the real rather than *replacements* of it through the insertion of contrived artistic entities, which carry their own imperatives and inducements.

It is central to the enterprise, accordingly, that one should merely *happen* upon the sounds, discover them as unexpected aural presences or—in the case I shall describe in a moment—as aural absences, when Neuhaus bestows a certain shaped silence into the flow of aural experience where it is least expected. Thus there is no plaque, at 46th Street, marking the fact that here is a work by Max Neuhaus, installed in 1977. One simply hits, as it were, an unresisting wall of sound, to which one may or may not pay attention, and which may or may not register on one's awareness. After all, the sound work does not shut out the surrounding noises, and one does not visit the island to admire the installation—not, at least, under the intended effect, which presupposes an initial unawareness of the work's existence. In the intended scenario, I suppose, the pedestrian carries away an impression of the sound life of the place having been intersected but not interrupted, as though a sound had occurred that left everything as it was and yet at the same time transfigured.

*The pedestrian carries away an impression of the sound life of the place having been intersected but not interrupted.*

Neuhaus sees himself as something of an acoustical benefactor, and it is characteristic of his sensibility that he sees aural squalor where the rest of us merely perceive noise. Anyone who has driven city streets knows the panic of hearing a siren, knowing one should pull over to allow the emergency vehicle to pass, but not being sure it is even on the same street. The noise seems everywhere, and nowhere. We take the ambiguity of sirens as a necessary evil, as do those who drive the emergency vehicles, they being unable to hear any noise other than their own siren. (There have been, as a result, calamitous accidents between police cars whose drivers could not hear each other.) The solution is to put "holes" in the sound, Neuhaus has told me, and then shape the siren so that its direction and velocity are clear. It has been difficult, however, to get funds for such research, since the National Science Foundation considers Neuhaus an artist and the National Endowment for the Arts does not subsidize applied science, and police departments have other priorities and are not disposed to fix what isn't broken. Neuhaus is not an artist like Christo, for whom the politics of getting his work accepted and installed is part of the artistic process. For Neuhaus, these are merely trials, even though a fair amount of his time is spent in getting support for his projects. A great deal of testing enters into the shaping of sounds, and a lot of electronic *bricolage*. The bills run up when art crosses the boundaries into everyday life, and it is far from plain that we shall ever get the humane sirens of Neuhaus's visionary imagination. We are fortunate to have the sound works we do have.

*Times Square* is the only public sound work by Neuhaus in New York at present, and one of only two of his works in the United States. The other is permanently installed in the stairwell at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, where it is in aural symbiosis with ordinary building sounds like those made by elevators and air-conditioning systems. For the most part, his works are found here and there in Europe, where he resides. He did have a piece in the 1983 Whitney Biennial, and its presence there is testimony that his work shares enough boundaries with the visual arts that the ones it shares with music do not disqualify it as a kind of sculpture, inasmuch as spatial contours are part of its essence, and its shape can be diagrammed without special notation. *Performed* music, of course, has shape, and the design of concert halls takes into consideration the question of the ideal location for listening to it. Stereophonic emission undertakes to achieve the same effect. But traditionally, spatial factors have no presence in the score, and it is as if shape were the price that melodies pay for being heard, an artifact of our hearing apparatus having evolved in such a way that we cannot help giving sounds a location. Spatial considerations tend to define a difference between our experience of music and our musical experience, and do not strictly belong to the latter, any more than do the coughs of a

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concert audience, which belong to the former. But then, because spatial considerations are essential to sound works, they cannot be classed as music. Moreover, for reasons I shall come to, a sound work cannot be recorded. It has to be experienced at the site for which it was designed.

In the case of the Whitney work of 1983, the site in question was the so-called sculpture court in front of the museum, on Madison Avenue, which is transected by the familiar noises of chugging buses and slamming truck gates, urgent sirens and impatient taxis, and the amiable chatter of those waiting to enter the museum, or of schoolchildren passing by in groups. *Time Piece* was composed, in perhaps both senses of the term, of these live sounds, which Neuhaus then "colored" and shifted somewhat in time, but in such a way that the slightly enhanced street noises heard by the museum visitors would have been heard as precisely those street noises and nothing more. But every quarter of an hour, the coloration ceased, leaving in its place an abruptly noticeable silence: the presence of a momentary absence. "For the few seconds after the sound is gone," Neuhaus writes, "what could be described as a transparent aural afterimage is superimposed on the everyday sounds of the environment." These periodic silences he terms a "silent alarm clock," using, in effect, the silence to awaken us to the noises of the passing world. Neuhaus has created just such a time-piece for the Kunsthalle in Bern, Switzerland, where, on each hour and half-hour, a sound, insinuated into the flow of sounds that constitute the aural fabric of life as it flows around that institution, suddenly ceases, striking the hour and half-hour with heard silences. It is as though the ordinary world is restored to consciousness, through these silences, every thirty minutes. It is, in fact, a very poetic idea.

Neuhaus had proposed such a clock for the Whitney, but it was rejected, in my view rightly, in favor of the more restricted *Time Piece* executed for the sculpture court. The idea of what he calls a "silent public clock for the immediate neighborhood surrounding the museum" would be invasive. The Bern Kunsthalle, so far as I can judge from photographs, is fairly isolated, and my sense is that the periodic kernels of silence would be heard mainly by those already approaching the site, and expecting artistic experience. But invading people's private spaces with public sounds and silences, even if art, raises questions of morality. The Whitney has had extreme difficulties in getting a new design (which I felt was marvelous) accepted by its neighborhood, partly on grounds that it did not "fit" (the existing building, by Marcel Breuer, would have been shot down had present sensibilities been in place when it was proposed). But at least it would only be seen, and then only by passers-by or those directly in front of it. A public clock would penetrate the entire area. Neuhaus himself has observed that "it is possible for most people to stay and even be comfortable in a room which is painted a color which they dislike—but few of us wish to remain in a place with a sound which annoys us."

Not long ago, *The New York Times* ran articles on a vexing noise in midtown, which was tracked down to a

FIREWORKS

I wonder if the dead in heaven see us this way—
as brief explosions in the middle distance
falling one after the other in the dark
inside a sparkling, inverted bowl of sea.
And some of us must crackle in a green dance
while others billow or grow spikes,
or are all roar without brilliance.
The best are gone in a flash, flung
to the starry arms of constellations
in vast space; while lesser lights gleam
a long while, like the jewels on the jeweler's black.
Given the right distance, all that fire
must look, simply, beautiful—even the black sparks,
the smallish red smeared comets
burnt at the horizon. I wonder if the dead
are safe in their heaven, if they see us at all,
or if it's only men and women, antelope, fox,
children and black flies, who stay after the show
to watch the white moon rising in slow motion
and then the night itself,
darker and brighter than before.

---

THE DETAILS

What a roadkill skunk can do is mild, is almost sweet
compared to the sewage plant below the bridge.
And it isn't the road that kills, but quick machines

like those in the Apollo documentary, which by some twist
followed the coming attractions for *Black Rain*, about Hiroshima,
so we were forced to see the fiery rocket differently,

its columns of smoke and giant letters, U-S-A,
that fleeting look of rapture on the faces of the scientists who watched
their ship sail toward the moon and touch its desolate face.

A friend once said, But don't you think most women tend to lose sight
of the big picture, and bog down in details? And I said yes,
apologetically, playing with a tiny thread, I guess I did—

which may be why the movie's climax seemed misplaced to me.
I knew they'd reach the moon, but wasn't so sure
they'd ever get back to earth again;

that bright intricate blue marble wrapped
in its translucent envelope, like a love letter
someone is tearing open in his hurry to think big.

And that Oriental woman, with her flower-face
uplifted and the oily black drops spattering on her cheeks and lips;
those details that we talked about, those details are the people.

*Liz Rosenberg*

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specific building, some of whose fittings were acted upon by the wind to create a sound neighbors found agonizing and unremitting. The noise was a side effect, unforeseen by the architect. But let us imagine, under the "1 percent" provision, which mandates that 1 percent of architectural costs be devoted to art attached to a building, that an architect were to collaborate with a sound artist, who in fact had designed the noise everyone found so noxious. Suppose it was an office building, and the artist defended his sound piece as "site specific," despite which neighbors petitioned for its removal. Then we would have a controversy almost exactly parallel to the one that rose over Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*, when cries of censorship filled the air, and the art world testified as one on behalf of artistic freedom. Admittedly, in the case of the midtown building, part of the agony may have been due to the fact that its victims did not know from whence the noise came; but it must be remembered that Neuhaus's art in part depends upon being "found" by people who do not expect it, and don't in any case always know from whence it comes. An annoying sound at Federal Plaza would have been even worse than *Tilted Arc* was felt to be, and this suggests some of the limits of public sound pieces, and perhaps of public art itself: It should not be invasive. And that may explain some of the blandness of much public art. The public sound artist has to pursue enhancement, and at the same time avoid the cost of annoyance. That agenda was set by Caliban, after all not quite the insensitive soul we thought: "Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments/Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices/ That, if I then had waked after long sleep,/ Will make me sleep again."

Max Neuhaus has only the resources of electronics to work with, and not, alas, Prospero's potent staff. So *Times Square* hardly meets Caliban's criteria. But I have read of a lovely piece he created in Cologne, next to the de-belled church of Saint Cäcilien, now a museum for medieval arts. It is called *Bell for St. Cäcilien*, and it consists of a disembodied bell sound that materializes out of nowhere in the little park that the former church flanks. It is like an aural memory of the edifice's former function, and a true piece of artistic magic. It must be a perfect aural experience to hear it, rich with its associations of place, just as *Times Square* is rich with the associations of its very different place. □

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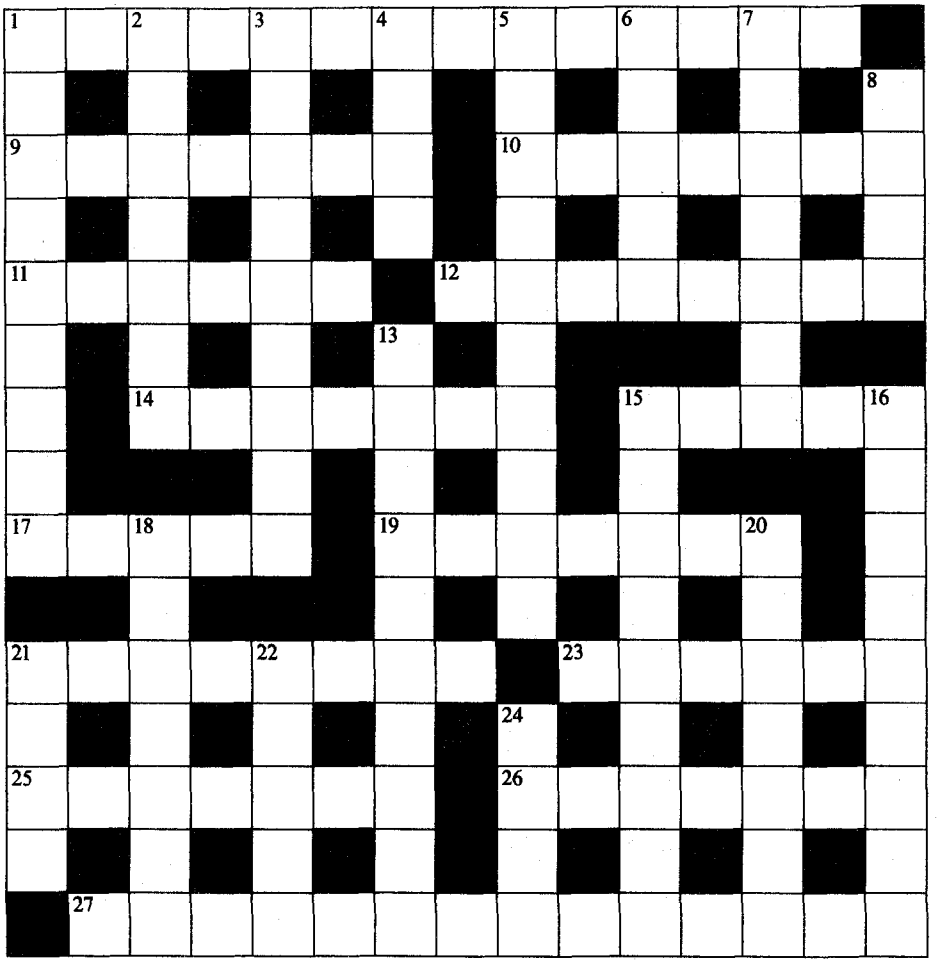
# Crossword Puzzle No. 2326

FRANK W. LEWIS



### ACROSS

1 The words might not sound right when you are doing it. (14)
9 Sounds like Tom may be easily duped. (4-3)
10 Marched out in disarray one might say he is to meet you. (7)
11 A well-known factor with unruly mobs, they're in shape to be spun around. (6)
12 See 21 down
14 Might evoke 16 down, since they're certainly exciting. (7)
15 Weller, in a sense, might make a calling, one hears. (5)
17 Lined up in preparation, avoids the issue. (5)
19 An article gets more confused as a mathematical statement. (7)
21 Miniature Cleos, and such? Some people play with them. (8)
23 Look to the Box Office for *Room With a View*. (6)
25 The Hesperides were ones of the blessed. (7)
26 Acts like the Red Baron? (7)
27 What seems to be a couple of fools is divided by the country to create political killings. (14)

### DOWN

1 Weapon assessed to be all chewed up? (9)
2 The way couch potatoes behave comes pointlessly to be what they watch! (7)
3 Certain countries keep a drinking establishment among their precious old treasures! (9)
4 and 24 Did the early Spaniards establish what we might see on TV with bad feeling? (3,5)
5 Descriptive of Byron's hoped-for joy. (9)
6 A rich mixture taken by the one who runs the meeting. (5)
7 Venom in a lot of cases contains a small amount. (7)
8 Not working like Coleridge's painted ship. (4)
13 However, locks seem to be things that contribute to the hold-up. (10)
15 Being one who deals in certain home remedies, Hoover commonly has a series of items written down. (9)
16 One's press isn't good, but they might follow your partner's bids. (9)
18 Makes a defensive move on board, with good defensive spots for the players against the French. (7
20 Are most disturbed by what you might call the conductor? (7)
21 and 12 across Gateway to the sea or merely the way in to the circus? (4,8)
22 Got an otherwise old carriage? (5)
24 See 4 down

SEE LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION AT LEFT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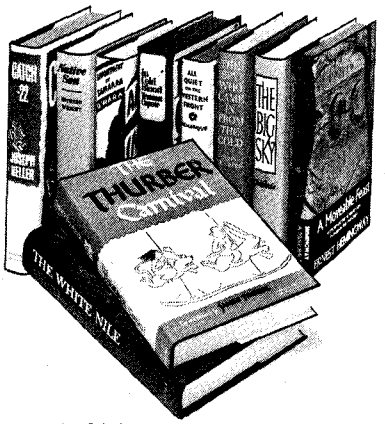


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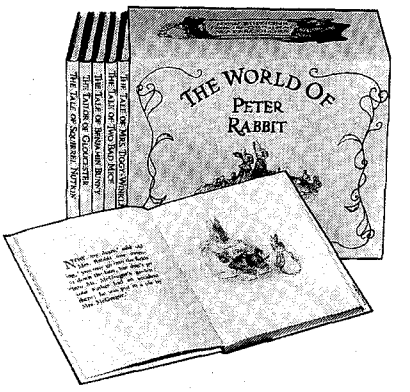


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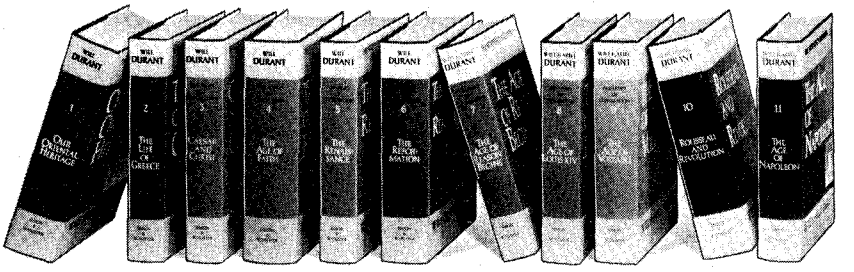


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